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STAR of BETHLEHEM
BY JOSEPH CANTELLO

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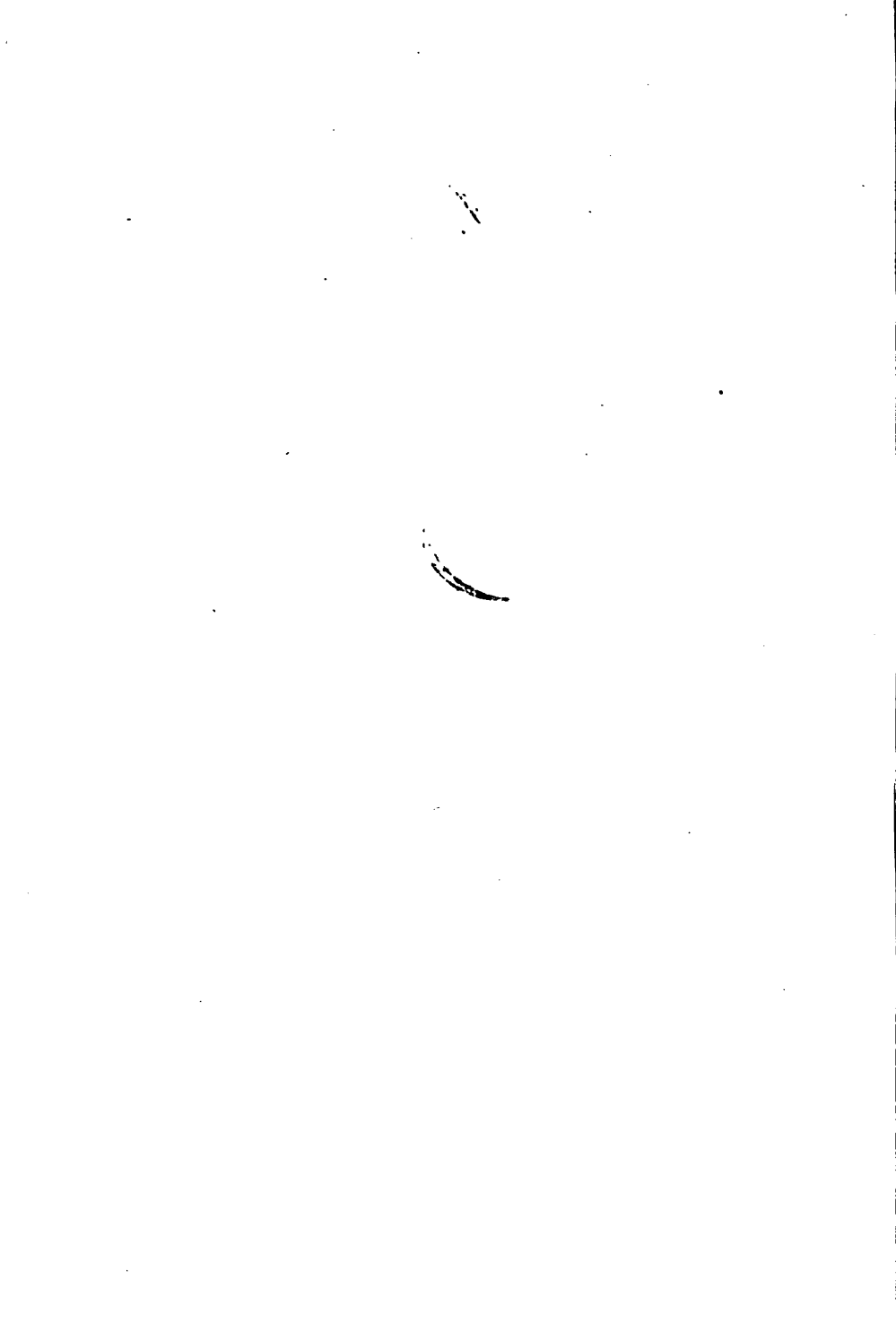
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The Star of Bethlehem

A SACRED DRAMA

IN FIVE ACTS

AND

A PRELUDE

BY

JOSEPH CANTELLO



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FOREWORD

It has been my purpose in this drama to present in a wholly reverential spirit incidents connected with the advent of the Messiah. I have endeavored to convey, as impressively as my limited powers would allow, the contrast between the vain show of earthly greatness, as exemplified in the empty pomp of the court of Augustus, "the Master of the World," and the gorgeous, oriental state of Herod, Judea's great, but wicked, king, with the divine glory attending the seemingly humble birth of the Redeemer of Mankind.

The date of our Savior's birth has never been accurately determined. The time fixed for the beginning of the Christian Era, in the year 532 A. D., by the monk Dionysius Exiguus, from which our present chronology is computed, namely, 753 from the foundation of Rome, is obviously wrong, since Herod died four years earlier.

Many facts also militate against the commonly accepted view that Christ was born in the last year of Herod's reign. The words of the angel to St Joseph (Matthew ii:13): "Arise, take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word," would seem to clearly imply that some time would elapse before the summons for the Holy

Family to return to Palestine; as does the statement (Matthew ii:14-15): "When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt; and was there until the death of Herod." It does not seem probable that the messenger of the Most High should have required that the delicate woman and tender infant should take a journey involving months of wearisome travel, had the cruel tyrant already been stricken with mortal sickness, so some more easily accessible place of concealment would suffice. Moreover, it is less likely that the frightful atrocity of the "Massacre of the Innocents" should have escaped the pen of Josephus had it been perpetrated at the end of the cruel monarch's blood-stained reign rather than in a less conspicuous period of his life. But the fact that to my mind incontrovertibly establishes the correctness of the date I have selected for the birth of our Lord, 745 from the foundation of Rome, is that in this year Augustus secured from the Roman Senate his reappointment as Consul for the express purpose of taking a census, which accords with the statement (Luke ii:1) "And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed;" since the taking of the census of the empire would unquestionably involve the imposition of a poll-tax.

I, therefore, feel that I am justifiable, not only by historical probability, but to the Christian unimpeachable authority of the Holy Scriptures, in my decision in this respect; and in tracing the domestic miseries, as well as the horrible bodily sufferings, probably the most

excruciating physical agonies ever endured by mortal man, which afflicted Herod in his last days, to the crowning horror of his career of crime, the fiendish slaughter of the helpless babes of Bethlehem.

For the rest, I have followed closely the traditions of the church, the gospel narratives, and reliable historical authorities in matters not of my own invention. Tales of the prodigies recounted in Act III as having occurred at Rome at the time of the Savior's birth, with others, are still current among the Catholics of Italy. The character of Queen Azili is imaginary, as is the circumstance of the death of the infant son of Herod in the "Massacre of the Innocents;" but the curses supposedly invoked by the bereaved queen upon the bloody tyrant were literally fulfilled.

JOSEPH CANTELLO,

Los Angeles, Cal., November 25, 1907.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ARCHANGEL.

CAESAR-AUGUSTUS, *Emperor of Rome.*

HEROD, *King of Judea.*

ARISTOBULUS } *His sons.*

ANTIPATER

JOSEPH OF NAZARETH, *husband of Mary.*

MAECENAS } *Counselors of Augustus.*

AGRIPPA

JELIND, *a shepherd of the hills.*

MATTHEW, *a lad, his under-shepherd.*

MEDOR, *shepherd of the plains.*

FIRZI, *his eldest son.*

BENONI, *his youngest.*

TOLLOMEO, *Captain of Herod's guard.*

LUCIAN, *Secretary of Augustus.*

PHEON, *a Greek slave, spy of Herod.*

MELCHIOR, } *Three Wise Men of the East.*

CASPAR,

BALTHAZAR

HIGH PRIEST.

PRIEST OF JUPITER.

PAGE TO AUGUSTUS.

PAGE TO HEROD.

SARAH, *wife of Jelind.*

HANNAH, *her daughter.*

AMARILLA, *wife of Medor.*

LADY OF THE COURT OF HEROD.

EMPRESS LIVIA, *wife of Augustus.*

QUEEN AZILI, *wife of Herod.*

MARY, *mother of Jesus.*

ANGELS, MESSENGERS *from the Provinces*, SCHOOLBOYS,
LORDS and LADIES *of the Court of AUGUSTUS and HEROD*,
DOCTORS *of the Law*, SHEPHERDS, PEOPLE *of Jerusalem*,
SOLDIERS and SERVANTS. *Spirits of MARIANNA, the*
murdered wife of HEROD, HYRCANUS, her grandfather.
and ARISTOBULUS, her brother.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENERY

PRELUDE.

Heavens, banked with luminous clouds, spanned by a rainbow.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—Audience Hall of palace of Emperor Cæsar-Augustus at Rome. Morning.

SCENE II.—Country near Bethlehem. Late afternoon.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—Home of Jelind, in hills beyond Bethlehem. Night.

SCENE II.—Exterior of the Place of the Nativity. Night.

ACT III.

Audience Hall of the palace of Emperor Cæsar-Augustus at Rome. Afternoon.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—A Street in Jerusalem. Morning.

SCENE II.—Grand Hall of the palace of Herod at Jerusalem. Later in the day.

SCENE III.—Place of the Nativity. The same night.

SCENE IV.—Anteroom of Herod's private apartments in his palace at Jerusalem. Midnight.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—Interior of the Place of the Nativity. Same night as in Act. IV.

SCENE II.—Garden and park of Herod's palace at Herodium. Late in the afternoon of the following day.

PRELUDE





The Star of Bethlehem

A bank of luminous clouds, completely spanned by a rainbow, with a background of blue sky. Upon the arch of the bow are standing fifteen angels. Seven on each side are clad in flowing robes, matching the colors of the bow, with gauzy wings to correspond, and starry wreaths. In the center is stationed an archangel, clad in purest white, with white wings. He, also wears a starry wreath. All the angels hold golden harps or dulcimers in their hands, except the archangel, who has a long, golden trumpet. The orchestra plays a fanfare as the curtain rises, when the archangel lowers his trumpet, and angels sing.

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

*Glory be to God in the highest!
On earth peace, to men good will.*

Glory! Glory! Glory!

Glory in the highest!

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
And to the Holy Ghost!*

Amen!

The Star of Bethlehem

[ARCHANGEL SINGS.]

SONG.

*Lo, tidings of great joy we bring
To men this happy morn.
Let heaven and earth with rapture ring,
The Prince of Peace is born.*

*He comes the bound to liberate,
To set the captives free;
The poor to bid with hearts elate
The dawn of gladness see.*

*He comes to sinners free from shame,
To wounded hearts allay;
And unto all the world proclaim
The Lord's accepted day.*

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

Audience Hall of the Palace of EMPEROR CAESAR-AUGUSTUS at Rome. On either side are massive, square, marble pillars, and in the rear is a colonnade of the same, with a great open portal, center, beyond which is a broad corridor. Left front, is a dais, on which are two antique chairs for the EMPEROR and EMPRESS. Beside the EMPEROR'S chair towards the front, is a small, antique stand. Around the walls are arranged pedestals, supporting bronze braziers, in which fires are burning in honor of the gods. There are closed bronze doors right and left. The floor is paved with variegated marbles.

To the music of a triumphal march the imperial court enters through corridor, filing in left, preceded by a guard of twelve soldiers, two of whom station themselves on either side of the portal, while the others form in line along the corridor back. A page slips in, and stations himself next to soldier, right of portal. Lastly, appear the EMPEROR AUGUSTUS and the EMPRESS LIVIA, the former attended by his counselors, MAECENAS and AGRIPPA, and his secretary, LUCIAN, and the latter by her ladies of honor, two of whom carry her train. The remainder of the court range themselves on the right of the hall, while MAE-

CENAS, AGRIPPA and LUCIAN take their places, left front, beside the EMPEROR'S chair, and the ladies of honor to the right of the EMPRESS back.

AUGUSTUS is over sixty years of age, but still vigorous and active in mind and body; and his face still bears traces of the classic beauty which was his in youth. He wears a purple toga, richly embroidered with gold, and his head is crowned with a wreath of gold laurels. The EMPRESS LIVIA is still in the prime of life, and is a woman of rare loveliness. She is arrayed in a gorgeous court costume, with a long, gold-embroidered purple mantle, and jewelled tiara. The men of the court wear togas, and the ladies ceremonial robes. MAECENAS and AGRIPPA are clad in the pure white togas worn by Roman senators. The page wears a simple Greek tunic, and LUCIAN the same, with a short blue cloak, and ink-horn attached to his girdle.

ALL THE COURT.

[*In chorus, as the EMPEROR and EMPRESS ascend dais.*]

All hail, Augustus! All hail, Augusta!

[*The EMPEROR and EMPRESS bow in acknowledgment of the salute, and seat themselves.*]

AUGUSTUS.

Admit the messengers.

[PAGE opens door right, and admits seven messengers, who advance, one by one, to foot of dais, kneel, and presents rolls of papyrus. AUGUSTUS receives each roll with a gracious nod of the head, and lays it on stand.]

FIRST MESSENGER.

From the Pro-Consul of Gaul, O Cæsar.

SECOND MESSENGER.

From the Pro-Consul of Egypt, O Cæsar.

THIRD MESSENGER.

From the Pro-Consul of Carthage, O Cæsar.

FOURTH MESSENGER.

From the Pro-Consul of Spain, O Cæsar.

FIFTH MESSENGER.

From Varus, Commander of the Legions in Germany,
O Cæsar.

SIXTH MESSENGER.

From Quintillus, Commander of the Legions in Britain,
O Cæsar.

SEVENTH MESSENGER.

From Herod, King of Judea, O Cæsar.

AUGUSTUS.

[*bowing.*]

'Tis well. Now the petitions from the people.

[*Page brings in basket filled with rolls of papyrus.*]

All petitions from my people, patrician or plebeian, Roman or foreign, shall receive my prompt attention.
[*Rises and turns to Secretary.*] Take these and them to thy study, Lucian. [*Indicates by gestures rolls on stand and in basket.*] I will see thee in my closet later.

LUCIAN.

Thy will is mine, O Cæsar.

[*LUCIAN picks up rolls on stand, and exits, center, after*

beckoning to page, who takes up basket and follows him. AUGUSTUS turns to the EMPRESS.]

AUGUSTUS.

Do thou, my dear Livia, entertain our court, and the strangers from afar, in our gardens, while I consult with my faithful counselors, the noble Mæcenas and Agrippa.

EMPRESS LIVIA.

[Rising and bowing.]

I obey, my lord.

ALL THE COURT.

[in chorus.]

All hail, Augustus! All hail, Augusta!
[The entire court, with the exception of MAECENAS and AGRIPPA, file out, the EMPRESS and her ladies last.]

AUGUSTUS.

[to MAECENAS.]

Has my edict commanding the inhabitants of all lands in the Roman dominions to repair to the place of the family origin, that all should be registered for taxation, been duly promulgated?

MAECENAS.

[bowing.]

It hath, Illustrious. Thine order was promptly obeyed, and thy will is now known to all subjects of Rome, even to the most remote boundaries of the empire.

AUGUSTUS.

'Tis well. I know I can always depend upon the zeal of thyself and the noble Agrippa.

MAECENAS AND AGRIPPA.

[*together*]

It is ever our pleasure to carry out thy commands, O
Cæsar.

AUGUSTUS.

[*bowing.*]

Thanks, trusty friends. I pray you listen to my new
edict.

[AUGUSTUS *advances to center, and takes roll of papyrus from the bosom of his toga. MAECENAS and AGRIPPA station themselves on either side of him. Unfastens roll and reads.*]

More than seven centuries have lapsed since Rome was founded, and seldom has she enjoyed the blessings of peace. Only twice in her whole history previous to our time have been closed the portals of the temple of Janus, her double-faced God of War: once, for a year after its erection by the benign Numa Pompilius, and for a like period at the close of the first war with Carthage, under the consulship of Manlius Tarquaus. The very foundation-stones of Rome were cemented in blood; for ere its walls had been reared by the wolf-nourished, twin brothers, Romulus and Remus, they quarreled over the name of the city, and the former slew the latter. Then the bold Romans, exclusively men, seized the women of their neighbors, the Sabines, who took up arms to rescue their stolen wives, and dishonored daughters. But the Sabine women interceded for peace, and the contending hosts became as brothers. As the young nation grew and

prospered, so narrow became the boundaries within the walls that a citizen could not leave his door without treading upon his neighbor's soil. Therefore, her brave sons were forced to cut their way out, and win lands for themselves with their blood. Thus was Rome even in infancy compelled to draw the sword; but victory then, as almost invariably since, perched upon her banners, and repeatedly was the new city decorated with palms of triumph. Returning victorious from their conquests, scarcely had her valiant warriors laid down their arms, when they were obliged to take them up against their own sovereign, Tarquinius, the Superb, who had not only slain senators, but violated Lucretia, an estimable Roman matron, and compelled the noble Virginius to slay with his own hands his only daughter, the fair Virginia, to save her from dishonor. Tarquinius, the last to wear the Latin crown, having been driven into exile with all his progeny, for two hundred and forty-four years Rome enjoyed liberty under the rule of the consuls; but they were years of constant conflict. First came the subjugation of Italy, then the long struggle with Carthage, followed by a series of civil wars, including the Agrarian uprising under the Gracchi, and fierce contest between the Plebeians and Patricians under Marius and Sulla, culminating in the treachery of the Senate, that forced my illustrious uncle, the immortal Julius, who after conquering all Gaul, had led his victorious legions into the land of the Germans, and the cliff-lined isle of Britain, to invade Italy in order to maintain his rights, and restore tranquility to the Roman state. When, this accomplished, he was foully assassinated in

the Senate-chamber, and I, with the aid of Antony, had avenged his death, I was myself compelled to wage war against my unfaithful ally, and his paramour, Cleopatra, to wipe out the insult to his wife, my fair sister, Octavia, whom he had basely deserted for that dissolute queen. Having overcome this guilty pair, and stamped out rebellion in our dominions, I thereupon ordered closed the portals of the temples of Janus. But revolt broke out in our Eastern provinces, and yet once again was I forced to draw the sword. Now, having crushed out every spark of sedition, I have once more closed the doors of the temple of the God of War; and pray that peace, like a balmy, summer breeze, may waft unto all lands owning the Roman sway, prosperity and felicity to all loyal subjects.

MAECENAS.

Truly, Illustrious, in Latin soil hath too luxuriantly flourished the gloomy cypress, even though by its side ever spring victorious palms, and triumphant laurels. We Romans cannot but rejoice that under thy benign rule we may spend our days in the shade of the olive of peace. But surely thou wouldst not have us forget that Rome would not be the great power she is, did not her sons callous their hands by the use of the sword, gray their hair under the helmet, and decorate with glorious wounds their dauntless breasts?

AUGUSTUS.

Nay, Mæcnas!

AGRIPPA.

Forsooth, O Cæsar, peace is a great boon to mankind,

but too often it brings enervation. Therefore, I would counsel that the present state of military inactivity should only be sufficiently prolonged to afford our gallant warriors a needed rest, and enable the people to recuperate their depleted resources. Occasion for war cannot fail to arise. For the barbarians upon our borders will be prone to mistake magnanimity for weakness; and in so vast an empire as that of Rome, comprising many diverse races and nations, jealousies, bickerings, and disloyal conspiracies, are bound to create disturbances, that must be crushed with an iron hand.

AUGUSTUS.

Thou speakest like a true soldier, Agrippa; but thou mistakest my purpose. The peace I would establish is not that which will encourage vicious habits, and rob our Roman youth of virile power. Enervating luxury and debauchery shall be sternly suppressed, the new defenders of the state shall be trained from early adolescence in all warlike exercises by such true and tried veterans as thyself, and Rome shall always in the midst of peace be fully prepared for war.

AGRIPPA.

I stand rebuked, O Cæsar, for my presumption in deeming that I could enlighten thy wisdom.

AUGUSTUS.

Nay, noble Agrippa, thy advice had been welcome had the same consideration not already dawned upon my mind. What say ye to the diction of my proclamation, good friends?

MAECENAS.

Verily the gods inspired thy utterances, Illustrious. Thy words should be inscribed on tablets of gold, and bequeathed to posterity as a precious heritage.

AGRIPPA.

Surely, O Cæsar, none born of woman can be greater than thou, or give voice to sayings that shall be so indelibly engraven upon the memories of men.

AUGUSTUS.

[*smiling.*]

Flatterers!

SCENE II.

A country landscape. Hills, covered with olive-groves and vineyards, among which a road winds. Glimpse of the town of Bethlehem in the background, right. Slightly right of center, is a low hillock, surmounted by a large palm tree. Yellow light of late afternoon pervades the scene.

Enter JOSEPH, left, leading laden donkey on which MARY is seated, her form enveloped in a long blue mantle, with hood. Joseph wears a plain brown robe, with leather girdle to which money-pouch is attached.

JOSEPH.

How pained am I at the sight of thy weariness, my dear Mary. This hath indeed been a hard journey for thee, in thy state, and in this inclement season.

MARY.

And thou, beloved Joseph, I perceive art dreadfully tired. But Divine Providence hath decreed that we should suffer, and we must not repine. We are almost at our journey's end; for yonder is the town of Bethlehem, and the Lord, who hath sustained us thus far, will give us strength to endure to the end.

JOSEPH.

Yea, Mary, I know that Jehovah ordains all things for the best, and am resigned to His will. But let me help thee to dismount; and do thou rest here, while I go unto the town, and engage lodgings for the night. It may require a considerable search, for I am told the place is crowded.

MARY.

As thou wilt, dear husband. But I pray thee to hasten thy return, since night draweth nigh.

[JOSEPH helps her to alight, and she seats herself on knoll at foot of palm tree. Exit JOSEPH right.]

Mine eyes are heavy with sleep. I will repose here awhile during Joseph's absence. O God, my Father! I know naught can befall me except by Thy will. Into Thy hands I commend my spirit.

[She sleeps. Angels sing without, the sound seeming to issue from the air above her.]

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

Hail Mary, full of grace!

The Lord is with thee.

Blessed art thou among women.

[*At the close of chorus there is a brief pause, and MARY awakes.*]

MARY.

[*Arising, crossing hands upon her breast, and raising eyes.*]

My soul what hast thou heard? The hour for the fulfillment of the holy mystery, foretold to me by the angel in the garden is at hand. The Lord of Life is about to descend from Heaven, and take human form through me, the humblest of His handmaids. Almighty God, how can I thank Thee for choosing me as the mother of Thy blessed Son! May mine eyes be prepared to behold the dawn of the light of heaven on a sin-cursed world; and mine ears opened to hear the divine utterances of the long-expected Messiah. Holy Ghost, my spiritual spouse, inspire my soul that I may be worthy of this transcendent honor. But, O, my Divine Son, where shall I find shelter for Thee? In what cradle shall I lay Thy infant form? No, my faith shall not falter. I am the handmaid of Jehovah who will provide all things needful for him and me. [*Glances down the road, right.*] Some one approaches. It may be a lawless man. I will conceal myself.

[*She slips behind palm-tree. Enter JELIND, right, wearing sheepskin coat, leggings, and cap, and carrying bundle suspended on shepherd's crook swung over his shoulder.*

JELIND.

[*Muttering to himself as he enters.*]

That Emperor Augustus must be crazy! [*Advances to center, puts down bundle and sits down upon it.*]

Wherefore made he us poor folks from all over the country go unto Bethlehem to be registered and taxed, I'd like to know? Methinks his tax collectors could easily have found all of us at our homes. Not but what it's bad enough to be taxed one place or another. They say he wanted to find out how many people there were in the world. To think of that! What business is it of his? But, besides, he wanted us all to pay him a tribute. Ah, that's the gist of the whole matter! Emperors, kings and all other kinds of rulers, are always up to that trick. It's easy for them to say, tax here, and tax there; but precious hard is it for the poor to pay. And wherefore take they our hard-earned pennies? Verily, but to pile up gold of which they can make no real use. [*Rises.*] Methinks the great folk are all half-cracked, anyway. Herod is always doing the craziest things, for all he is called the Great; and it seemeth this wonderful Augustus-Cæsar isn't much better. Like the pulling of teeth was it for me to sell that good, fat sheep to pay his tribute. But it was a case of needs must; for had I not gone and paid, his officers would have been down upon me in no time, and cleaned out the house. No matter, I registered, I paid. I am a loyal subject, and an honest citizen. Let it go at that. [*Picks up bundle.*] I must be trudging on homeward. [*Takes a few steps, looks back over left shoulder and sees MARY.*] There is a woman hiding behind that palm tree. I wonder wherefore doth she that? Verily, must she be afraid of me. [*Laughs.*] Mayhap she hath lost her way? I'll find out. Come forth, O woman! I will hurt thee not, I'm an honest man.

[*Mary steps from behind tree. JELIND stares at her in open-mouth admiration.*]

MARY.

Peace be unto thee, friend.

JELIND.

[*Making a low, awkward obeisance.*]

Peace be unto thee, gracious lady. My stars, but thou art beautiful! Whence comest thou?

MARY.

[*Coming forward, center.*]

I came from Nazareth, with my husband. He hath gone unto Bethlehem to engage us lodgings for the night, and I await his return here.

JELIND.

A good time he'll have finding them, I promise thee. People there are packed together like pressed figs, the place is so crowded. [*Glances out, right.*] Behold a man approacheth by the road yonder. Perchance that is thy husband?

[*Enter JOSEPH, right.*]

MARY.

[*Turning to JOSEPH*]

What was the result of thy search, my dear Joseph? Surely thou wast able to find some kind of shelter for the night?

JOSEPH.

[*Shaking his head sadly*]

Nay, dearest Mary, we are in God's hands. I sought diligently, but could find no place for us to lay our heads.

MARY.

[Clasping her hands.]

Alas! Alas! *[Weeps.]*

JOSEPH.

[Throwing his arms about her shoulders, and drawing her head down upon his breast.]

Be comforted, dear Mary. Jehovah hath us in His keeping, as thou hast always said. Let us put our trust in Him.

JELIND.

[Aside.]

Verily, that lady hath the face of an angel. I could kneel before her. Mayhap I can think of a plan to help her and her noble-looking husband out of their fix. I'll speak to them.

MARY.

[Lifting her head from JOSEPH's shoulders, taking handkerchief from her bosom, and wiping her eyes.]

Yea, Joseph. My faith did but fail me for the instant. The Lord is our refuge. He will protect us, now and ever.

JELIND.

[Taking a step towards them, and making a low obeisance.]

Peace be unto thee, good Rabbi.

JOSEPH.

Peace be unto thee, friend. But call me not, "Good Rabbi." Goodness pertains only to God. And no rabbi am I, but only a simple carpenter of Nazareth.

JELIND.

[*Staring at him in blank amazement.*]

A carpenter? A workingman? And thou the husband of the loveliest woman in the whole world? How can that be?

JOSEPH.

By God's great grace, my friend.

JELIND.

[*Gazing at him intently.*]

But surely thou art of some high family?

JOSEPH.

[*With an air of regal dignity.*]

Yea, friend. I am of the house of David.

JELIND.

[*Excitedly.*]

I knew it! I knew it! Thou art a king by right, though thou hast no throne. It seemeth kings, like other folk, get not always their dues. But think me not impertinent, if I ask art thou not one of those who cometh to Bethlehem to register, and be taxed, in obedience to the order of the great emperor?

JOSEPH.

Even so, friend.

JELIND.

And as I was telling thy most beautiful and gracious lady but now, thou couldst find no place of shelter there?

JOSEPH.

None.

JELIND.

Yea, verily. I went unto the town last night; and so great was the multitude gathered there that the time of my life had I in finding a place to rest my weary bones. I sought the inn, and all the other houses of entertainment; but the landlords drove me away like a dog. Had I been rich, they would have been more polite, though that would not have found me lodging where none was to be had. One made a great favor of giving me a stoop of wine, half water, and then had I to pay double. That is the way of the world. [*Surveys JOSEPH's clothing critically.*] A poor man, in working clothes, even though he be a son of David, will be treated with scant ceremony these times. Even ye shall see it, my noble friends, even ye shall see it.

JOSEPH.

But surely some shelter can be found in the town, in a private house, or the synagogue, a corner at least for my poor wife?

JELIND.

Alas, no! There is no chance of it. People have been flocking thither all day; and last night they were packed like eggs in a basket, in the Synagogue, the public square, and the streets. There wasn't an inch of room to spare, no matter which way you turned. And many a man was given such a jab, that he went down, and was half trampled to death by the crowd. I myself spent the night in the porch of the Synagogue; but I had to fight for my place. At such a time as this, it is every man for himself I can tell thee.

JOSEPH.

What are we to do?

JELIND.

[Scratching his head thoughtfully.]

Let me see. Some way there must be of getting thee out of this fix. I would my home were nearer. Thou wouldst be most welcome there; and my good wife, Sarah, and my daughter, Hannah, would be delighted to minister unto thy gracious lady. But it is much too far away. It would not be possible for the lady to stand so long a journey. And night is coming on.

[Lights are slowly lowered.]

MARY.

Think thou not we could find in the town a shed, or even a stable, in which I could spend the night?

JELIND.

[Shaking his head emphatically.]

Nay, sweet lady. If such a place were to be found, it would be sure to be frequented by rough men, whose language would shock thee, even if they did not have the presumption to actually offer thee insult. *[Claps hands to his head.]* A stable! Ah, I have it! There is in yonder hill *[points out right,]* a cave some one once made into a stable, but which hath been long disused. It is a poor place enough, but weather-tight, and sheltered from the wind. Often have I folded my flocks there, when they have strayed hither on cold, winter nights, and found it very comfortable.

MARY.

Verily, the Lord hath sent thee to our deliverance, kind shepherd. Come, Joseph, we will seek this refuge Jehovah hath provided for us, as soon as thou hast rewarded this poor man for his service.

JOSEPH.

Yea, Mary. How shall we discover this place of which thou speakest, friend?

JELIND.

Nothing could be easier. Follow the high-road until thou comest to a place where two roads join it, and take the right. Then descend to the plain by the trail to the left, and thou shalt see it.

JOSEPH.

It is far, then?

JELIND.

Nay, not more than two good throws from where the trail branches off, which is scarce a quarter of a mile from the turn in the highway yonder, where the roads meet.

[*Points out right.*]

JOSEPH.

Thanks, friend. [*Takes coin from pouch attached to his girdle, and extends it to JELIND.*] Take this piece of silver as small payment for thy kindness.

JELIND.

[*Drawing back, with a gesture of refusal.*]

Nay, noble Master Joseph. Thou seest I must give thee some title. I am a poor man, but I would not have

thee pay me for the small help I give thee and thy most lovely lady gladly. But suffer me to kiss thy hand.

JOSEPH.

[Putting money back in pouch.]

Then, the Lord reward thee.

[JOSEPH extends hand, while JELIND drops to one knee and kisses it fervently. As the latter rises, MARY also extends hers, but he draws back.]

JELIND.

Nay, divinely beautiful lady, thou art too far above me, for me to even touch the hem of thy garment. Thy face shineth like unto some glorious star. Surely the spirit of the Lord is upon thee.

MARY.

Thou makest me blush with thy praises, friend. But verily the Most High hath favored me, His handmaid, in a way thou knowest not of. His peace be unto thee, and unto thy household.

JELIND.

[With a deep obeisance.]

And unto thee and thine, most gracious lady.

[JELIND walks backward reverently to left, 1, and exits.]

JOSEPH.

Verily, from the simple ones of earth Jehovah hath perfected praise. "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord." Now, Mary, let us seek our humble shelter. I have tethered our beast yonder, that thou mayest ride thither.

MARY.

Yea, Joseph. How wonderful are the ways of the Lord, our God! Behold how He raised up for us this humble friend in our hour of direful need. Blessed is the name of the Lord.

[They walk slowly towards right. Rosy gleam, as of afterglow, illuminates the scene.]





ACT II.

SCENE I.

Home of JELIND. Precipitous, rocky hills, with a background of deep, blue sky, pierced here and there, so that the light from behind represents the gleam of stars. Left, front, is a square, stone cottage, with practical door, through the chinks of which light streams. The scene is dark, as on a clear, starry night.

[Enter JELIND, right with bundle suspended from shepherd's crook, as before. He walks slowly and haltingly, as if very tired.]

JELIND.

[Beginning to speak as he enters.]

Verily, was it a wise man that made the proverb, "The night was created for fools." A fine time have I had picking my way over the rough hill roads this dark night. *[Halts center.]* It wasn't only the darkness that bothered me either. The angelic face of that woman, I met just out of Bethlehem, set my poor brains wool-gathering so, it's no wonder I missed the path more than once. *[Sighs heavily.]* That last mile or two was a hard pull; but now that I am home at last, I am almost rested. *[Glances toward house.]* I see light shining through the cracks

in the door. I wonder what hath kept the folks up so late?

[He puts down bundle, approaches cottage, hears voices within, and puts ear to chink in door. After listening a moment, he straightens himself, and retreats a step or two.]

They speak of a beautiful young man. What mean they? *[Scratches head thoughtfully.]* Perchance some gay, young spark would fain woo my sweet child, Hannah. An that be so, I'll soon put a stop to such folly. When she be old enough I shall betroth her to Matthew, who is an honest lad, and the best hand I ever had with the sheep. *[Pounds forcibly on door with fist.]*

MATTHEW.

[within.]

Who art thou that disturbest us at this hour?

JELIND.

[impatiently.]

Who? Why, I, Jelind, thy master. Who else?

MATTHEW.

[angrily.]

Go thou about thy business. My master is in Bethlehem. Thou art that same roystering fellow who last night did hammer on our door; and when I didst open took to thy heels. An had I not a woman and a damsel to protect, I would e'en issue forth and give thee a sound drubbing.

JELIND.

[Furiously, pounding again on door.]

Open! Open! I, Jelind, command thee!

SARAH.

[*within.*]

It is he! That is my husband's voice! Open quickly.
[*The door is thrown violently open; and MATTHEW, SARAH, and HANNAH, all rush out together. JELIND backs away toward center, as if fearful they had lost their senses.*]

MATTHEW.

Wonderful, master, wonderful!

SARAH.

Marvelous!

HANNAH.

Oh, Father, such a sight as we have seen!

JELIND.

[*impatiently.*]

Then tell it me, and speak not all at once.

SARAH.

Do thou tell it, Hannah.

MATTHEW.

Yea, Hannah, thou canst relate it best. Thou seest the wonder first.

HANNAH.

Lo, Father, scarce an hour since, as I was milking the goats in the stable, while Matthew was folding the sheep, there suddenly shone round about me a light brighter than the sun at noonday. Then straightway appeared

in the midst of it, the doors being shut, a form like unto a young man, clad in shining, white raiment, whose face was fair as the dawn-light upon the mountains. Thereupon, came in mother and Matthew; and the beautiful youth spake unto us, in tones sweeter than the most beautiful music, saying "This night is the Messiah born at Bethlehem. Go ye thither, and adore Him. Ye will find Him laid in a manger." And he vanished from our sight. Surely he was an angel of the Lord.

JELIND.

Yea, verily. Yet wherefore an angel should be sent to poor, simple shepherd-folk in sooth I know not. [*Assumes an air of deep reverence.*] But, verily, the ways of Jehovah are beyond comprehension of men.

[*He takes off his hat as he mentions the sacred name.*

MATTHEW also takes off hat, and all bow.]

SARAH.

Already had we made preparations to go and seek the Holy Babe, expecting thee not home until the morrow. But now that thou art here, thou must needs sup, and take thy rest; and early in the morning will we go forth, and find Him.

JELIND.

Nay, I will but eat some bread and cheese, and drink a draught of milk, then shall we start. Yet whither shall we seek the Blessed One. In Bethlehem is such confusion that naught will we learn there. [*Claps hands to head.*] Ah, a great light dawneth upon me! Thou sayest,

Hannah, that the angel said the child will be found laid in a manger?

HANNAH.

Yea, Father.

JELIND.

Ah, it is so! Know ye that I, also, have seen an angel, but in the form of a woman.

MATTHEW, SARAH and HANNAH.

[*together.*]

A woman?

JELIND.

Yea, a most beautiful and gracious lady.

MATTHEW.

But the rabbins tell us the Scriptures speak naught of women angels?

JELIND.

Yea, so do they. But, nevertheless, upon this lady rested the spirit of the Most High. Listen. [*He sits down on bundle, center, SARAH and HANNAH sit Oriental fashion on his left, and MATTHEW throws himself on ground to his right.*] When on the evening of yesterday I came unto Bethlehem; and had sold the fat sheep I led thither for money to pay the foolish tax of the great emperor Augustus—and much did it grieve me to do so—I sought a place to lodge. But, lo, so great was the multitude there, that not even a shed could I find wherein to lay me. Therefore, was I forced to seek shelter in the porch of the synagogue, where after much tribulation,

found I a corner to rest in. When morning was come, I hastened to buy the things needful, and repaired to the office of the tax collector, that I might be registered, and pay the tribute; for I had no mind to spend another night gasping like a fish out of water, jostled and knocked about by a rough crowd. But so long was the line of people before me, that it was nigh unto sunset ere my business was accomplished.

SARAH.

Then thou paidst the tax?

JELIND.

Yea, I paid. I needs must, or fare the worst, like many another. But the Lord rebuke all emperors and kings with their burdensome taxes on the poor, say I. And, lo, it befell, as I journeyed homeward, nigh unto the town came I upon the beautiful lady whereof I spake. She was seated under a palm tree, and not in the whole world could there be another like unto her. Her face was pale, yet shone it with a glorious light, even as the mild, soft beams of yonder beautiful star. [*Points to star in sky.*] I spake unto her, for methought perchance she had missed her way, and needed guidance. She answered most graciously, and told me she was come from Nazareth with her husband, who had gone unto Bethlehem to seek lodgings. Thereupon, returned he from thence, having sought shelter in vain at the inn, and elsewhere; upon hearing which I didst direct them to the disused stable, where thou rememberest, Matthew, we were wont at times to fold our sheep on winter nights?

MATTHEW.

[*nodding his head emphatically.*]

Yea, Master, well remember I the place.

SARAH.

Who were these people?

JELIND.

Of the lady learned I naught save what I already told ye. But her husband saith he was Joseph, a carpenter of Nazareth, though of the house of David, the great king; and verily would I have known that he came of some high race without the telling, for though clad in the garb of a workingman, he looked more royal than ever Herod did in all his splendid raiment.

HANNAH.

But what of the lady, Father? Surely thou hast more in thy mind concerning her?

JELIND.

Yea, verily, it is she that is the mother of the Messiah; for as thou sayest, the angel told thee the child is laid in the manger, and, lo, in the old stable wherein she found refuge is a niche hollowed from the rock from which beasts were wont to feed.

MATTHEW.

[*nodding his head.*]

Yea, so there is, often have I seen it.

JELIND.

Therefore let us arise, and go forth to seek the young

child and his mother there. [*All rise.*] Had the place been another surely had the angel of the Lord directed us hither. Do thou, Sarah, gather together such things needful as we possess, that we may minister unto Him whom Jehovah hath sent to be the hope of Israel and the world, and His blessed mother.

SARAH.

It shall be as thou sayest, husband. But thinkest thou not it were better that Hannah remained at home? Hours since she should have been in her bed.

JELIND.

Yea, daughter, thou hadst better stay here; or if thou fearest to abide alone in the house, thou mayest await our return at the home of our neighbor below in the valley.

HANNAH.

[*clasp ing her hands in fervent entreaty.*]

Oh, Father! Oh, Mother! Forbid me not to go with ye. Not for all the gold in the world would I miss greeting the Holy Babe.

JELIND.

But bethink thee, child? The way is long, and the hillpaths are rough. It will be a hard jaunt. Another time will thy mother take thee thither. [*Pats her head affectionately.*]

HANNAH.

Nay, Father, I am strong, and can well bear the journey. And hast thou forgotten that it was unto me

the angel of the Lord first appeared, and to me chiefly that he spake?

JELIND.

[*bowing his head reverently.*]

Ah, so was it! Verily we must not disobey the commands of Jehovah expressed through His blessed messenger. Come thou with us.

[JELIND *takes up bundle, and exits into the house. Others follow.*]

Dark Change.

Before stage is lighted, angel chorus is heard, preluded by a great burst of music, and dies away as scene opens.

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

Glory be to God in the highest!

On earth peace! Good will to men!

Glory! Glory! Glory!

Glory in the highest!"

SCENE II.

The place of the Nativity. Night. Background same as in previous scene, right back, set diagonally, a cavern in a rocky hill walled up in front with rough masonry. Practical door of rough planks in its center, and small, square openings on each side of this for windows. Latticed aperture in top of door, through which light streams across stage. Left, a slanting trail, bordered by great rocks, ascends

abruptly. As chorus of angels dies away, JOSEPH opens door of cavern, enters, and advances to front center.

JOSEPH.

[Crossing hands on breast and gazing heavenward.]

"Peace on earth," proclaim the harbingers of the Most High, and, verily, nature respondeth to the Lord's behest. How beautiful is the night. All earth lies wrapt in holy calm, and breathes forth the spirit of adoration; while the air yet throbs with the beat of angels' wings, and exhales the sweet odors of their presence. O, Almighty Jehovah, I thank Thee that Thou hast bestowed upon me the guardianship of Thy blessed Son. Enlighten my understanding, that I may faithfully discharge Thy sacred trust. And may mankind be prepared to accept the divine message of Him who cometh in the name of the Lord.

MARY.

[within, calling faintly.]

Joseph! Joseph!

JOSEPH.

Yea, Mary, I come.

[He hastily re-enters cavern, and closes door.]

JELIND.

[Speaking, without, left, as if at top of trail.]

This is the place. Well I knew I could not miss the way even on so dark a night.

SARAH.

[also, without.]

Yea, husband. No one better than thou knoweth the country about here.

JELIND, *followed by MATTHEW, SARAH and HANNAH, descend trail, and halt left. JELIND carries dressed lamb wrapped in a cloth on his shoulder, MATTHEW a chicken in his hand, and SARAH and HANNAH each have small bundles. JELIND turns around and appears to be consulting the others inaudibly. JELIND and MATTHEW wear sheepskin coats, leggings and caps, and SARAH and HANNAH Oriental robes, with long cloaks.*

MARY.

[within, in a tone of terror.]

Oh, Joseph, I hear voices! Can this portend harm to the blessed Child.

JOSEPH.

[soothingly.]

Nay, Mary, they who approach are no doubt friends. Nevertheless will I bar the door while I parley with them. *[He bars door. JELIND puts down lamb, goes up to it, and knocks.]* Who is it that cometh hither, and what wouldst thou?

JELIND.

It is I, Master Joseph, the shepherd who directed thee hither.

[JOSEPH opens door, JELIND retreats a step or two, and he steps out.]

JOSEPH.

[bowing graciously.]

Thou art welcome, friend, and these with thee.

JELIND.

These are Sarah, my wife, Hannah, my daughter, and Matthew, the lad who abideth in the house with us. Ere I reached home after meeting thee and thy lovely lady upon the road yonder, [*Points out left*] an angel of the Lord appeared unto them saying, that the Messiah was born at Bethlehem, and that they should find Him laid in a manger. Therefore, led I them hither; for methought it must be the place whereof the angel spake.

JOSEPH.

Yea, verily, thou wert right. This night the prophecies of the Holy Scriptures are here fulfilled.

JELIND.

Blessed be the name of the Lord! Behold I have brought with me a young lamb, the pick of my flock, Matthew a cockerel I gave him for his own, and Sarah and Hannah such things as they deem needful for the Holy Babe, and His mother.

JOSEPH.

The Lord reward ye all for this kindness. I pray ye enter.

[*JELIND picks up lamb, and enters cavern, MATTHEW, SARAH and HANNAH follow him when JOSEPH steps in and closes door. Stage remains empty for an instant; and Star of Bethlehem appears in the sky at extreme left, and moves slowly towards right. JELIND, MATTHEW, SARAH and HANNAH file out from door, followed by JOSEPH, who leaves it open, so light from within streams across stage.*]

JOSEPH.

The peace of Jehovah abide with ye.

JELIND, MATTHEW, SARAH *and* HANNAH.

[together.]

And with thee and thine, O, Master.

[JOSEPH goes in, and shuts door. JELIND and his companions walk slowly toward trail.]

MEDOR.

[without, left, as if at summit of trail.]

Yea, our way leads thither. Yonder moves the star.

JELIND.

[Pausing, near foot of trail, left center.]

Verily, I know that voice. It is that of Medor, chief of the shepherds of the plain.

[MEDOR descends trail, followed by FIRZI, AMARILLA, leading BENONI, and band of shepherds. All are in costume similar to JELIND and his companions.]

MEDOR.

[to JELIND.]

Who art thou?

JELIND.

I am Jelind of the hills. Well met, brother.

MEDOR.

Well met, neighbor Jelind.

JELIND.

[bowing to AMARILLA, who returns his salute.]

And here is thy good wife, Amarilla, Firzi, and thy

sturdy boy, Benoni. How he grows! Verily, we shall soon see him married. [SARAH and HANNAH advance to meet AMARILLA and BENONI, and they converse together inaudibly. MATTHEW claps FIRZI's hand, and they also seem to engage in conversation.] But wherefore comest thou, with thy family and these other shepherds to this unfrequented place at this hour? Go ye unto Bethlehem to be registered, and pay the tribute the Roman emperor hath laid upon us?

MEDOR.

Nay, that did we three days since. We seek the Messiah, who angels of the Lord proclaimed unto us is born this night at Bethlehem. For, lo, as we watched our flocks upon the plain, about the hour of midnight a great light shone forth in the heavens, and there appeared a great company of angels, who sang:

*"Glory be to God in the highest!
On earth peace! Good will to men!
Glory! Glory! Glory!
Glory in the highest!"*

FIRZI.

And, as we gazed upward, lost in awe and amazement, suddenly stood forth in the midst of us one in shining garments, and with face glorious as the summer moon, who spake unto us, saying: "Go ye unto Bethlehem; for there this night is the Messiah born of a virgin. Follow ye his star in the heavens, and it will guide ye to the place where He is laid." Then, straightway, he vanished; and, lo, we saw in the sky a strange and beautiful star, that

moved before us as we walked. It we followed, and it hath led us hither.

MEDOR.

A moment tarried we at our home, that we might tell these mavel's to Amarilla, and bid her come with us; and nothing would do but Benoni must come also.

AMARILLA.

Yea, he made me take him from his bed; and bravely hath he trudged all the way, complaining naught of the distance, nor of the roughness of the road.

SARAH.

It was even so with our Hannah, whom her father and I would fain have had abide at home while we fared forth on the same errand.

[The Star stands still over top of hill, directly above center of cavern and steadily grows brighter.]

JELIND.

Know ye, friends, that we also have seen wonderful things. Yesterday, as evening drew near, as I was journeying homeward from Bethlehem, whither I had gone to be registered and pay my tax, on the high road, not far from this very spot, met I a most lovely lady, and a noble-looking man, for whom no place of lodging could be found in the town, and directed them to yonder disused stable for shelter. Meanwhile, an angel of the Lord, even such as thou describest, Firzi, appeared unto Hannah, Sarah and Matthew, at our house, the doors being shut; and bade them go forth to seek the Messiah,

who was born at Bethlehem, and had been laid in a manger. Therefore, I hearing these things, conducted them hither. And verily this night are the Scriptures fulfilled in our eyes. Yonder in a manger rests the new-born Messiah. Already have I and my house done our poor honor to the Holy One of Israel.

FIRZI.

Yea, that is the place. Behold the star hath stayed its course above it, and blazes forth with new splendor.

MEDOR.

Come, friends, let us likewise seek out the Holy Babe, that we also may worship Him.

[MEDOR and his family, followed by their band of shepherds slowly and reverently approach cavern.]

BENONI.

Why, mother, it is the same old stable where thou wast wont to go with me for our noontime rest, when we were watching the sheep on yonder plain. *[Points right, front.]* Many a time thou hast combed my hair and sang me to sleep therein.

AMARILLA.

Yea, my child, it is verily the same place.

[JOSEPH throws open door of cavern, letting light stream out across stage.]

JOSEPH.

Peace be unto ye, friends.

MEDOR AND COMPANIONS.

[together.]

And to thee and thine, O, Master!

[*They all make deep obeisance, then kneel in semi-circle in front of door. JELIND, SARAH, MATTHEW, and HANNAH also kneel somewhat behind the others.*]

ALL THE SHEPHERDS.

Hosanna to the Messiah! Hosanna to our Lord!

[*A rosy light, as of the dawn tinges the sky, back. Angels sing, without, pianissimo, as if in the distance.*]

ANGEL CHORUS.

*Glory be to the Father, And to the Son,
And to the Holy Ghost!
Amen.*

ACT III.



Audience Hall of the Palace of the EMPEROR CAESAR-AUGUSTUS of Rome. Same as Scene I, Act I, except that the corridor, back, is completely screened from view by purple curtains, suspended behind colonnade, and great central portal. There are no guards.

[Enter AUGUSTUS by door, left, in white toga, bordered with purple. He paces floor pensively, as if lost in thought.]

AUGUSTUS.

[pausing center.]

Strange that vision of the woman and the child. What can it portend?

[Enter PAGE by door, right.]

PAGE.

[Approaching emperor, and making low obeisance.]

Aristobulus, Prince of Judea, craves audience, O, Cæsar.

AUGUSTUS.

Admit him.

[Exit page. The emperor ascends dais, and seats himself in chair, as in Act I. PAGE opens door for ARISTOBULUS, who enters, when he closes it with

another obeisance. ARISTOBULUS approaches dais and drops on one knee.]

AUGUSTUS.

Welcome, Prince of Judea. What wouldst thou?

ARISTOBULUS.

I kneel at thy feet, O Cæsar, on behalf of my brother Alexander and myself, unfortunate sons of Herod, by Marianna, unhappy descendant of the great Simon Maccabeus, craving from thee, Illustrious, pity and justice.

AUGUSTUS.

Rise, worthy scion of the blood of heroes, and make known what thou desirest of me. It will be my pleasure to right any wrong thy brother and thyself may have suffered.

ARISTOBULUS.

[rising.]

No, doubt, O, Cæsar, thou art aware of the many crimes committed by our father. Hast thou not heard how he slew the venerable Hyrcanus, grand sire of our mother, also our uncle Aristobulus, her brother, of whom I am the namesake. Of no other fault could he accuse them save that they were pretenders to the throne, being of the royal blood of the Maccabees. Yet small must have been the danger from either; for Hyrcanus was eighty-four years of age, past all earthly ambitions, and Aristobulus but fifteen, without experience with men or knowledge of the world.

AUGUSTUS.

Yea, of these things have I heard.

ARISTOBULUS.

For these acts of wanton cruelty he was so bitterly upbraided by our mother, that against her he turned his resentment. So giving ear to the base calumnies circulated against her by her implacable foes, Dori, his first wife, whom he had repudiated, and our aunt Salome, his sister, he likewise took her life.

AUGUSTUS.

Something of this know I.

ARISTOBULUS.

Our father some time since recalled to his court Antipater, son of Dori, whom he hath proclaimed heir to his throne, although my brother and myself he had hitherto acknowledged as his rightful successors, both as being his sons, and the last of the blood of the Maccabees. Therefore we, who for our education and training here in Rome, under thy benign eye, Illustrious, return thee humble and dutiful thanks, knowing these things, fear to reside at his court except under thy august protection.

AUGUSTUS.

Methinks, prince, these fears on the part of thy brother Alexander and thyself are but the children of fancy. Ye are the sons of Herod, and it is well known that he dearly loved thy mother, even though in a misguided hour he slew her. He may, indeed, deny ye the succession to his throne, though the final decision with regard to that rests with Rome; but it cannot be possible that ye can be in jeopardy at his court, so long as ye remain guiltless of wrong doing, no matter who may be your accusers.

ARISTOBULUS.

[*indignantly.*]

Nay, O, Cæsar, we are Maccabees, who were never cowards. But under the tutelage of thine own dauntless warriors have we been taught that prudence no less than courage becomes the true soldier. Our fears are by no means groundless. Our uncle Pheroras, no less than our aunt, Salome, hates us for our mother's sake as does Dori, whom Antipater, her son, hath persuaded our father to recall from exile, and who no doubt will by her machinations succeed in driving from his court in disgrace, Azili, his present beautiful and charming queen, even if she does not compass her death as she did that of our mother. Antipater will stop at naught to remove us from his path, that his right to the throne may be undisputed; and in this in all ways will his mother aid him, actuated both by maternal love and pride, and enmity to us.

AUGUSTUS.

[*Descending steps of dais, and grasping ARISTOBULUS' hand.*]

Well spoken, son of the Maccabees. I meant not to impugn the valor of thyself, or thy noble brother, to whom I pray thee to commend me. Fear nothing. I, Cæsar, will protect ye both with all the power of Rome. For the time being abide ye here; and I will summon your father hither that I may exact from him such assurance of your safety as will render the machinations of all the conspirators of Judea powerless to work ye harm.

ARISTOBULUS.

I thank ye, Illustrious, in the name of my brother and myself. But I pray thee to suffer no delay in this matter; for at this very moment our enemies at the court of our father may be plotting our destruction.

AUGUSTUS.

Again I say, fear nothing. Fare thee well.

ARISTOBULUS.

I withdraw, with sense of deepest gratitude, O Cæsar.
[ARISTOBULUS, *with a profound obeisance retires, and exits by door, right.* AUGUSTUS *takes tablet from the bosom of his toga, writes on it. Claps hands. Enter PAGE, right.*]

AUGUSTUS.

[*handing tablet to PAGE.*]

Take this to Lucian. Bid him frame a dispatch therefrom immediately, and bring it to me for my signature here.

[PAGE *bows, and exits hastily, left.* AUGUSTUS *paces floor to right and back; and then re-ascends dais, seats himself, and thoughtfully leans chin on hand. Looks up.*]

Yea, the bloodthirsty spirit of this tyrant of Judea must be curbed.

[*Re-enter PAGE right.*]

PAGE.

A priest of Jupiter craves audience, O Cæsar.

AUGUSTUS.

Admit him.

[*Enter PRIEST by door, right, in full sacerdotal costume.*]

PRIEST.

[*approaching dais and making low obeisance*]

All hail, O Cæsar!

AUGUSTUS.

All hail! How can I serve thee, reverend Father?

PRIEST.

I come, Augustus, from the sacred hierarchy now assembled in our great temple of Jupiter on the Capitola to discuss the marvelous portents that have spread amazement and consternation throughout the city. The holy fathers deem it meet that thou as Pontiff Maximus of Rome should be at once apprised of these extraordinary and inexplicable occurrences.

AUGUSTUS.

Strange that this should not have been reported to me ere this. What are these portents?

PRIEST.

Last night, at about the twelfth hour, while the people were celebrating the festival of the Saturnalia, suddenly appeared in the heavens a dazzling light; and with a sound like thunder a great stone crashed through the roof of the temple of Vesta, shattering its walls, and extinguishing the sacred fire so long by the holy Vestal Virgins with all diligence and veneration. At the same time, the images of all the gods in Rome were thrown down, and broken to pieces.

AUGUSTUS.

Strange! What explanation offer the sacred augurs?

PRIEST.

None, Illustrious.

AUGUSTUS.

And what thinkest thou these things portend?

PRIEST.

I know not. But one thing hath impressed me in connection with these marvelous phenomena.

AUGUSTUS.

What?

PRIEST.

Hast thou ever noticed, Illustrious, the inscription over the portal of the now ruined temple of Vesta?

AUGUSTUS.

Yea, many times. It read, "Temple which shall endure perpetually."

PRIEST.

Even so, O Cæsar. It was erected, as thou knowest, by the pious and vituous Numa Pompilius, who as Romulus, is known as the father of our glorious city, may well be considered the father of the Roman religion, since he instituted the worship of our gods. On its completion it is said he questioned his holy sibyl, the nymph Aegeria, who prophesied that it would endure until a virgin should bring forth a child. This being deemed impossible said inscription was carved above its portals.

AUGUSTUS.

[*in a bewildered tone*]

The virgin and child! The virgin and child!

PRIEST.

[*amazed*]

What meanest thou, Illustrious?

AUGUSTUS.

Naught that I can tell thee now.

PRIEST.

[*gazing at him curiously*]

As thou wilt, Augustus. I have yet other marvels to relate. This morn 'tis said three suns appeared upon the horizon; and country people, flocking to the city in amazement, declare that in this mid-winter season orchard trees put forth leaves and blossoms, the earth is covered with fresh, green grasses, and flowers have burst into bloom; so that the bees have left their hives and come back laden with honey.

AUGUSTUS.

[*shaking his head doubtfully*]

These last would seem to be auspicious omens; but the destruction of the holy temple and the images of the gods, together with the extinction of the sacred fire, fill me with dread lest they presage direful calamities. Moreover, I have myself yet other proof that the immortals have now in store a great revelation to mankind. Woe is me, if after I have established the world in peace, at the cost of the anguish of my own heart, and the blood of my people,

there should be impending over us a visitation of the wrath of the gods. Yet if it is their will, so must it be. Truly the purposes of the divinities are beyond the limits of human knowledge.

PRIEST.

I pray thee, Illustrious, be not cast down by the series of prodigies I have related, the two last of which thou acknowledgest to be of good import. As thou sayest the purposes of the immortals are beyond the comprehension of men. Undoubtedly the gods love to be feared, and are prone to punish with severity all infractions of their will; still they would not be adored as they are, were they not ever more inclined to confer benefits than to fulminate vengeance. But what message shall I convey to the sacred conclave?

AUGUSTUS.

Bid the holy ministers of our faith order in my name the rarest marbles, and engage the most skilful artificers, that the ruined temple may be rebuilt and embellished on a scale of the utmost magnificence. Let them likewise call to their aid the most famous sculptors of the empire in order to fittingly replace the images of the gods. Bid them, also, redouble their zeal in the exercise of their holy offices, that the divine anger may be averted.

PRIEST.

It shall be as thou commandest, O Cæsar. I salute thee, Augustus.

AUGUSTUS.

Hail and farewell.

[*The PRIEST, with reverential obeisance, retires, and exits by door, right. AUGUSTUS re-ascends dais, resumes seat, and again assumes a thoughtful attitude for a moment, then speaks in a perplexed tone.*]

The virgin and child! The virgin and child!

[*Enter LUCIAN by door, left, with sheet of papyrus in his hand. He advances to steps of dais and makes obeisance.*]

LUCIAN.

[*extending papyrus*]

Here is the dispatch thou badest me prepare, O Cæsar.

AUGUSTUS.

[*taking sheet, and glancing over it*]

'Tis well. I wil sign it.

[*LUCIAN places stand in front of the EMPEROR, dips quill in vial of ink attached to his girdle, and hands it to AUGUSTUS with a low bow. The EMPEROR lays papyrus on table, and hastily signs it, and hands it to LUCIAN, who restores stand to former position.*]

Let it be forwarded to Judea immediately.

LUCIAN.

[*bowing low again*]

Thou shalt be obeyed, O Cæsar.

[*With another obeisance, he exits by door, left. Enter PAGE by door, right.*]

PAGE.

The noble senators, Mæcenæ and Agrippa, O Cæsar.

AUGUSTUS.

Bid them enter.

[*Exit PAGE. Enter MAECENAS and AGRIPPA. AUGUSTUS descends from dais.*]

MAECENAS AND AGRIPPA.

[*together, bowing*]

All hail, O Cæsar!

AUGUSTUS.

[*bowing.*]

Hail, noble friends, and welcome!

MAECENAS.

[*stepping slightly in front of AGRIPPA and bowing*]

We come, Illustrious, from the Senate Chamber to announce to thee that this day, by unanimous vote, the Conscript Fathers hath decreed that thou, whilst still in the flesh, shall be accorded the honor often previously bestowed upon eminent Romans whose spirits have been translated to the stars, and should receive due homage as a god. Therefore, have they issued an order that thy statue shall be set up in all the temples, and the people should everywhere adore it as the simulacrum of the Patron Deity of Rome.

AUGUSTUS.

[*firmly*]

I thank the noble senators for their zeal in my behalf; but far be it from me to accept this honor. What reason assigned they for this preposterous resolution?

MAECENAS.

The reason, Augustus, was twofold. Firstly, thy unparalleled wisdom, which partakes more of the divine than the human; secondly, the prodigies of last night the holy augurs now declare must indicate that the Romans should select a new god; since the fact that the images of the old were overthrown throughout the city, and the sacred fire extinguished, would lead to the conclusion that they had forsaken us.

AUGUSTUS.

My wisdom is but that of mere man, and often fallible. Moreover, in this case methinks the holy augurs have erred. Far more likely is it, that having foreknowledge of the purposes of men, the gods have sent these portents as a warning against this act of presumption.

AGRIPPA.

[*advancing*]

I pray thee reflect, Illustrious.

AUGUSTUS.

No reflection, my dear friend, will alter my determination. Too well know I the limitations of my humanity to arrogate to myself equality with the immortals. Not thus can be averted the threatened castigation of angry deities. Tell the Senate I absolutely forbid the publication of this impious decree. Furthermore, it is my intention to myself issue an edict prohibiting that I be called Lord of the World, as hath been proposed. The application of Augustus, conferred upon me by the Senate, I

accepted, deeming it befitting to my office of Pontiff Maximus, and the people call me Father of Our Country. I want no other titles.

MAECENAS AND AGRIPPA.

[together.]

But, Illustrious—

AUGUSTUS.

Not another word, good friends.

[Enter EMPRESS LIVIA by door, left.]

EMPRESS.

[pausing, left center.]

I perceive, my lord, that thou art engaged with thy counselors in the discussion of matters of state. Shall I withdraw?

AUGUSTUS.

Nay, dearest Livia, thou knowest well that I have no secrets from thee.

[The EMPRESS comes forward left center.]

MAECENAS AND AGRIPPA.

[together, bowing low.]

All hail, Augusta!

EMPRESS.

[bowing]

Hail, noble senators!

AUGUSTUS.

These friends, my dear Livia, but now announced to me that the venerable Senate hath conferred upon me the

title of god, and ordered that my statue should be worshipped in all the temples of Rome.

EMPRESS.

[in a tone of delight.]

Then, thou shalt be a god and I a goddess. We shall be truly Augustus and Augusta.

AUGUSTUS.

Nay, I have refused.

EMPRESS.

[in an amazed and disappointed tone]

Refused?

AUGUSTUS.

Yea, refused.

EMPRESS.

[still amazed]

But wherefore, my lord?

AUGUSTUS.

Several reasons have I already given these, my faithful counselors, yet another will I now disclose. Listen, Livia. Listen, friends. Last evening, being greatly troubled by a strange foreboding, and depression of spirits, I sought my garden by the Campidolio, and summoned hither the famous Tiburtine Sibyl, wonder of our time, who when I questioned her made no answer, but only pointed upward. And gazing towards the heavens, as she indicated, I beheld standing upon a luminous cloud, the form of a beautiful woman, with an infant in her arms wrapped in a mantle. Her face was pure and lovely

as that of an innocent maiden, and round her and the child shone a great golden glory, like that in which the immortals bask. Then, as overcome with awe, I fell on my knees and stretched out my arms in adoration, I heard a mighty voice peal forth, even in the thunderous tones of Jove himself: "This is the Lord of Lords, born of a virgin," and then again: "Lo, He is greater than thou." Moreover, when I returned hither, and sought my couch, thrice in my dreams did I behold that same vision, and heard the awful voice repeat: "He is greater than thou."

EMPRESS.

And for such a mere phantasm wouldst thou throw away the honors of divinity?

[Lights are slowly lowered.]

AUGUSTUS.

My dearest wife, I am Augustus, and thou art Augusta. Art thou not content with such a title as satisfies me?

EMPRESS.

Yea, my lord, thou knowest that in all things thy will is mine. Yet were it not well to give the matter further consideration?

AUGUSTUS.

It is ever my dearest wish to please thee. Therefore, will I reflect upon it, although certain am I that my decision is irrevocable.

[He retires up stage, and stands for a moment with back towards audience as if plunged in thought. The EMPRESS also walks back left center, as if intending to

ed, curtains back of grand portal center, are drawn back, and the vision of the Virgin and Child appears, illumined with a bright, golden radiance. He falls on his knees, and stretches out his arms.]

Yea, thou art greater than I!

EMPRESS.

[in a tone of bewilderment.]

Greater than thou? Greater than thou?

[She stands for a few seconds her eyes fastened on the vision, then drops on her knees beside her husband, and also stretches out her arms. MAECENAS and AGRIPPA stand still, right front, staring at vision in blank amazement.]





ACT IV.

SCENE I.

A street in Jerusalem. Buildings of Oriental style, apparently of massive stone, with flat roofs, surrounded by parapets, and partially covered with bright-colored awnings. In front of arched doorway of building at left of scene is suspended a tankard, indicating that it is a tavern. Sound of laughter of men and clang of metal heard at rising of curtain.

At opening of scene people of Oriental, Greek and Roman costume are seen passing and re-passing. A male voice is heard singing, without, left, as if in tavern.

SONG.

*"When the wine is in, the wit is out,"
So say the sages wise;
But when our skins are full of wine
Wit we may well despise.
Then pledge we all the ruby wine
That makes the spirits glad.
Better be happy and be drunk,
Than sober and be sad.*

CHORUS.

*"When the wine is in, the wit is out,"
So say the sages wise;
But when our skins are full of wine
Wit we may well despise.*

[*Sound of uproarious laughter of men and boys, without, left. JELIND enters, left, front, carrying long, low basket on his arm, containing a number of little sacks of dressed lamb-skin filled with cream-curds. Two boys, with writing tablets attached to their girdles, tug at opposite end, while JELIND pulls violently in the effort to disengage it from their grasp. They continue the struggle half-way across stage. The boys scream with laughter, and mirth continues without.*]

JELIND.

[while pulling at basket, angrily.]

Ye young thieves, vagabonds, children of Beelzebub!
Let go ere I call the Watch!

[Boys laugh uproariously.]

FIRST BOY.

Not until we have a sample of thy cream-curds, Father Shepherd.

SECOND BOY.

Yea, thou farest through the streets crying, "Who'll have my cream-curds?" And verily will we.

JELIND.

[with rising anger.]

But where is your money, ye young vagabond? Where is your money?

[Boys laugh.]

FIRST BOY.

We need none. We of the Rabbinical school are privileged.

JELIND.

[in a violent rage.]

Imps! Children of the Evil One! Is this what the Rabbins teach ye?

[Boys laugh again.]

FIRST BOY.

Nay, we teach ourselves to help ourselves.

SECOND BOY.

Verily, that do we.

[JELIND gives basket a violent jerk, both boys let go; and while he is staggering about trying to recover his balance, first boy snatches one of the sacks of curds, and runs off, left. JELIND clutches at second boy, who eludes him, and runs after his companion. He turns around as he reaches left, I.]

Farewell, Father Shepherd! Let us know when thou comest hither again with thy cream-curds.

[Runs off laughing.]

JELIND.

[Looking out, left, and shaking fist at retreating boys]

Thieves! Scoundrels! Wretches! [Another burst of

laughter, without. JELIND *again shakes fist.*] Yea, laugh! Laugh! This is a fine way to treat a poor stranger, pack of rascals that ye are! [*Shakes fist again. More laughter, without. He turns toward audience.*] Verily, here in the city is an unmannerly rabble. In the country we think it not sport to rob and mistreat an unoffending stranger. Hither came I to sell my cream-curds, thinking I should find a better market than in Bethlehem. But, alas, small gain am I likely to have this day. 'Tis well I was able to at last shake off the last of the band of unruly school-boys that set upon me in yonder street ere they had filched my entire stock. Cute young rascals were they; for whilst some did parley with me, others stole up behind, and snatched sacks of curds from my basket. [*Counts sacks in basket.*] Three and four—six—six and five makes ten. Yea, a full half-dozen have they stolen. Glad am I they laid not hands on the biggest. [*Holds up large sack.*] But I forgive the mischievous lads, and the rude tavern roysterers who egged them on. Since I first beheld that lovely lady, and paid homage to her blessed Son, the Infant Messiah, no more can I harbor resentment. [*HE starts to go. Looks out, right.*] Lo, who are these three men, in strange and splendid raiment I behold approaching? Verily must they be kings of far countries. And one of them is a black man. This is indeed prodigious. Methought all black men were slaves.

[JELIND *stands still at back of scene, and watches curiously.* Enter MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR, and CASPAR, *right, i.* BALTHAZAR *is a black man.* They pause

at entrance. Their attendants remain in wings just without.]

MELCHIOR.

[to BALTHAZAR and CASPAR]

At last, after our long and weary journey, have we arrived at the city of Jerusalem. But here thus far have we heard naught of him who in inspired visions we were told was to be born King of the Jews.

BALTHAZAR.

Yet this is the seat of the kings of Judea.

CASPAR.

As thou sayest. And hither have we been guided by the mysterious star, that announced to us the birth of the glorious prince, whom we were told would be the redeemer of the world. This it seemeth must be our destination.

BALTHAZAR.

Still see we here no signs of rejoicing over such a momentous event.

MELCHIOR.

Perchance we have come too late, and the festivities are already over. But let us question yonder shepherd. Mayhap from him may we gain some knowledge of the matter. *[Addressess JELIND.]* Come hither, friend.

JELIND.

[approaching timidly and bowing awkwardly]

What would your Majesty?

MELCHIOR.

Canst thou tell us, good Shepherd, if within the past few days hath been born a king of Judea?

JELIND.

Nay, O Majesty, our King Herod was not born yesterday, nor within a few days, or a few years, for that matter. He is well nigh as old as Father Adam, to judge from his looks. [*Glances at BALTHAZAR and CASPAR.*] As your Majesties will say when ye have seen him.

CASPAR.

[*impatiently*]

But surely within a fortnight hath been born a son to thy king who is heir to the throne?

JELIND.

[*scratching his head*]

An it be so, naught have I heard of it, and we see not how it can well be. To be sure there's no knowing what crazy notion King Herod will take into his head; but, methinks, if such a child had been born, I would have had news of it ere this. Kings are wont to bid all us poor folk rejoice whenever we have a new royal mouth to feed. [*Glances apprehensively from one of the MAGI to the other.*] I beg your Majesties' pardon if my speech sounds too bold. I am unused to the ways of cities, being only a shepherd of the hills beyond Bethlehem, who cometh to Jerusalem occasionally to sell my cream-curd, and am accustomed to speak my mind freely.

[*The MAGI laugh.*]

MELCHIOR.

[in a tone of kindly amusement]

Nay, friend, thy plain speech offendeth us not. And thou art sure no prince hath lately been born to succeed to the throne of Judea?

JELIND.

Yea, your Majesty, King Herod's youngest son by the beautiful Queen Azili is nigh unto two years old, and is now at nurse in Bethlehem. I know naught of any other. Wilt thou not buy some of my cream-curds? They are fresh made this morning, and thou wilt find them delicious.

MELCHIOR.

[with a courteous gesture of refusal.]

Nay, I have no need of any at present.

JELIND.

[offering sacks of curds to BALTHAZAR and CASPAR.]

Will ye not try some, majesties? I will deliver them at your lodgings an ye wish.

BALTHAZAR and CASPAR.

[together.]

We need them not.

MELCHIOR.

[in a laughing tone]

Nevertheless, if we may not purchase thy wares, here is a piece of silver for thy trouble.

[HE drops coin in JELIND'S basket, BALTHAZAR and CASPAR follow his example. JELIND makes obeisance.]

The three wise men walk dignifiedly to left 1, and exit. Their attendants follow. JELIND offers them his curds as they pass.]

JELIND.

Curds! Fresh cream-curds! [*Attendants shake their heads, and exit, left 1. JELIND stares after them as they disappear.*] These strange people do not seem to care much for cream-curds. [*Picks coins out of basket and bites each piece.*] Nevertheless, have I good profit this day. Yet would it have been a funny sight to see those black men eating white cream-curds. [*Laughs, and exits, right 1. Crying out his wares.*] Cream-curds! Fresh cream-curds!

[*People pass and re-pass again for a minute or two. Re-enter JELIND right 1.*]

Lo, my poor wits have been wool-gathering again. wherefore told I not those strange kings of the Holy Babe born twelve days since at Bethlehem. As he is the Messiah, he must needs be King of the Jews, as well as King of Kings. I must haste to seek them out, and tell them of the Blessed Child and His mother.

[*Exits hastily, left 1.*]

SCENE II.

Audience hall of KING HEROD in Jerusalem. Corinthian columns, right and left, and open colonnade of the same, back, showing terrace beyond, along which sentries are pacing. In the background is a garden,

stately towers and buildings, and distant view of the temple on Mount Zion. Doorway, left 2, hung with Oriental draperies. Right, front, is a dais, on which stands a throne surmounted by a canopy. The floor is a variegated marble, like that of the palace of AUGUSTUS.

Members of court discovered, gathered in groups, apparently engaged in earnest discussion. PRINCE ANTIPATER, son of HEROD, distinguished by his rich dress, and coronet of gold, passes stealthily from one group to another, as if intent upon overhearing the conversation.

[Enter HEROD from terrace, in royal robes, and wearing crown, center. On his appearance a sudden hush falls on the assembly, and the courtiers bow low as he passes them. He walks slowly and moodily, with downcast head to dais, and seats himself on throne.]

COURTIERS.

[in chorus]

All hail, King Herod!

[HE acknowledges the salutation with a curt nod, and beckons to ANTIPATER, who approaches dais, then dismisses court with a wave of the hand. All exeunt except ANTIPATER.]

HEROD.

[to ANTIPATER]

What matter was it members of the court were discussing so earnestly as I entered?

ANTIPATER.

They spake, O Father, of the wonderful new star, that twelve days since flamed forth in the heavens, and then disappeared. Last night it blazed out again with new splendor. This strange phenomenon hath amazed and affrighted all the dwellers in Jerusalem.

HEROD.

Yea, of this have I heard. What say men the prodigy portend?

ANTIPATER.

Most believe it can but presage the birth of the Messiah.

HEROD.

[thoughtfully]

The Messiah? The Messiah?

ANTIPATER.

And this morning arrived in the city three men of kingly aspect, who declare they seek one who is born King of the Jews.

HEROD.

[in a tone of indignation]

King of the Jews? I am King of the Jews? Who dare usurp my throne.

ANTIPATER.

None, O King, my Father, dare conspire against thee.

HEROD.

I make not so sure of that. There have been plots enow since I have wielded the scepter.

ANTIPATER.

But they have all been crushed.

HEROD.

Yea, and I will continue to crush them. Not one of my own flesh and blood will I spare who riseth up against me. Knowest thou where these distinguished strangers are lodged?

ANTIPATER.

Nay, Father.

HEROD.

Go thou, then, seek Pheon, and bid him come to me immediately by the secret way thou knowest of. Then return thou hither.

ANTIPATER.

Yea, Father, thy commands shall be obeyed.

[Exit ANTIPATER hastily by door left.]

HEROD.

[leaning chin on hand]

Of all men most miserable is he who wears a crown. Its gold and gems but make it the heavier burden for the brow. Ah, wretched me! What hath it profiteth me that boasting no royal blood I have been elevated to a throne, when I can only maintain it at the cost of blood. Only through terror can I reign. *[He comes down from dais and paces floor moodily. Pauses, center.]* Nowhere on earth is there one whom I can call friend. My courtiers are but lying sycophants, who would rejoice at my death or overthrow. None of my kindred

can I trust, nay, not even one of mine own children. [*Paces floor again, then returns to center.*] But one woman have I ever loved, Marianna, and she for a time returned my passion. But her love turned to hatred when I was forced to slay her grandsire and her brother, whom a rebellious people would fain have crowned in my stead. So enraged at her fierce upbraidings, and the proof of her encouragement of plots against me, her I likewise slew. [*Clasps his hands convulsively.*] And since that hour to mine eyes all things are red. Before me ever swims a sea of blood. [*Shudders. Then rears his form proudly.*] But I am Herod, King of the Jews, and so will I remain. Not even the divine Messiah shall supplant me. [*Knock on wall, right of throne.*]

[*Secret door in wall opens, and PHEON enters.*]

PHEON.

[*dropping on knee before HEROD*]

All hail, O King!

HEROD.

Knowest thou where lodge the three mysterious strangers who arrived in our city this morning?

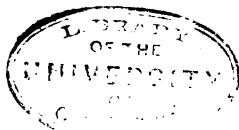
PHEON.

Yea, O King. The place is nigh at hand.

HEROD.

Guide thou thither my son, Antipater, return by the secret way, and await my pleasure in the hidden chamber.

[*PHEON bows. Enter ANTIPATER, HEROD turns to him, and takes signet-ring from his finger.*]



The Star of Bethlehem

91

Take my ring, and go thou with Pheon, who will point thee out the place of sojourn of the three kingly strangers whereof we spake. Greet them in my name, and bid them make haste to visit me here. See thou that they are treated with all the honors of royalty.

ANTIPATER.

[bowing, and taking ring]

I hasten to obey, O Father.

[ANTIPATER exits by way of terrace. PHEON rises, makes obeisance, and follows him. HEROD again paces floor with agitated steps.]

HEROD.

I feel the crown trembling upon my brow. Who is this that is born King of the Jews? Long since was it prophesied unto me that a child should occupy my throne. This must be he. But him will I slay, as I have the other pretenders before him, although all the Land of Israel shall run with blood ere it be accomplished. Since I mounted the throne, through the favor of great Antony, supplanting Antigone, for thirty years have I held it despite the murmurs and outbreaks of my rebellious people, and the treachery of those I would fain have made my friends. Surely I can maintain it to the end. *[Claps his hands. Enter PAGE, who makes profound obeisance.]* Seek out the High Priest at his palace, and bid him assemble within the hour the most learned doctors of the Law in all Jerusalem. Make haste.

PAGE.

[with another obeisance]

It shall be as though I had wings to my feet to do thy bidding, O King.

[*Exit PAGE hastily, center. Enter LADY in attendance upon QUEEN AZILI by door, left. HEROD stays her with a gesture.*]

LADY.

[*dropping a sweeping curtesy.*]

All hail, O King!

HEROD.

Where is the Queen?

LADY.

She hath gone unto Bethlehem, may it please thee, O King, to visit the infant prince at nurse there.

HEROD.

Unto Bethlehem? 'Tis well. Upon her return bid her wait upon me.

LADY.

Thy commands shall be obeyed, O King.

[*She makes another curtesy and exits, center. HEROD moodily paces floor as before for a minute, then ascends dais, seats himself, and leans chin on hand. Enter ANTIPATER center, followed by MELCHIOR, CASPAR and BALTHAZAR. They approach dais. HEROD rises.*]

ANTIPATER.

[*making obeisance*]

Behold, O King, my Father, these are the famed Magi

thou badest me invite to honor thee by a visit to thy court.

HEROD.

Most welcome are ye, O illustrious strangers, to my city of Jerusalem, and my palace.

[*The three MAGI salaam.*]

MELCHIOR.

We thank thee, O King, for thus honoring us.

HEROD.

But now was I apprised of your arrival, whereupon dispatched I my beloved son there, Antipater, to seek ye out, that I might greet ye, and lay all the resources of my kingdom at your disposal.

CASPAR.

Thou doest us too great honor, O King.

BALTHAZAR.

This courtesy, O King, confirms the report we have heard of thy hospitality.

HEROD.

Kings honor themselves in bestowing honor upon the wise. Something have I heard of the purpose that brings ye to our realm. Seek ye not the Messiah, that divinely-appointed prince foretold by our inspired prophets of old, whose birth the people of Israel are hourly expecting?

MELCHIOR.

We seek him who is born King of the Jews, for so was

it revealed unto us. His Star have we seen in the East, and are come to worship him.

HEROD.

Even so. It must be the Messiah whom ye seek. No other can it be. In all ways possible will I aid ye in your search. Already have I called a council of the wise men of my realm, that they may declare unto me the place where this glorious prince is to be born. When this I have ascertained, immediately will I communicate it unto ye. Meanwhile, I beg that ye will honor me by partaking of the refreshment my son Antipater will have prepared. Then will we confer further on this important subject.

MELCHIOR.

Greatly are we beholden to thee, O King, for this as thy other courtesies.

CASPAR *and* BALTHAZAR.

[*together.*]

Our venerable colleague voices our sentiments, O, King.

HEROD.

[*turning to ANTIPATER.*]

Conduct these noble strangers to our banquet-hall, and order such a feast as befits royal visitors set before them.

ANTIPATER.

[*with a profound obeisance.*]

It shall be as thou sayest, O King, my father.

[*The MAGI salaam, and follow ANTIPATER. He and they*

dais, seats himself again on the throne, leans chin exit, center, turning to the left. HEROD re-ascends on hand, and is apparently plunged in gloomy reverie. Enter HIGH PRIEST and DOCTORS OF THE LAW from the right center.

HIGH PRIEST.

[making an obeisance.]

In obedience to thy command, O King, these learned doctors and myself here present ourselves. What is thy royal pleasure?

HEROD.

Thou have I summoned, together with these distinguished students of the Sacred Scriptures, that ye may consult together, and declare unto me where say the prophets the Messiah is to be born, whose advent our people now believe to be nigh at hand.

HIGH PRIEST.

[bowing.]

Thy will is ours, O King. Permit us to refer to the rolls of prophecy.

HEROD.

'Tis well. I will patiently await your report.

[With a profound obeisance the HIGH PRIEST retires, and joins the DOCTORS, who after bowing to HEROD, retire up stage, left, where they consult rolls of prophecy, and confer together. HEROD sits still, leaning chin on hand, and again seems lost in gloomy meditation.]

DOCTORS *conclude their conference, and* HIGH PRIEST *again approaches dais.]*

HIGH PRIEST.

[with another obeisance.]

Unanimously the learned doctors declare, O King, that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. For thus it is written by the prophet: "And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, art not the least among the princes of Judea; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."

HEROD.

'Tis well. Accept my thanks.

HIGH PRIEST.

It is our pleasure to serve thee, O King

[HIGH PRIEST and DOCTORS OF THE LAW *all bow profoundly. Exeunt center, leaving by terrace to the right. Enter ANTIPATER and the three MAGI, from the left, center. The latter approach dais, and again salaam. HEROD rises.]*

HEROD.

Again welcome, illustrious strangers. But now hath adjourned the convocation of eminent students of our sacred Scriptures, whom I called together with a view of aiding ye in your search for the great prince of Israel, whose birth was miraculously foretold to ye. The council hath declared unto me that according to the word of the holy prophet of Jehovah he is to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. My son, Antipater, will accompany ye thither,

and provide a fitting escort, that ye may journey in all honor.

MELCHIOR.

We thank thee, O King, for thy gracious offer; but we must pursue our search unattended, for thus was it revealed unto us by celestial visitants in inspired visions.

HEROD.

So be it. Yet must our son, Antipater, to return with ye to your inn, and in all ways expedite the preparations for your departure. Then when ye have come unto Bethlehem, seek diligently for the child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

MELCHIOR.

Thy favor overwhelms us, O King.

HEROD.

Nay, noble friend. It is my pleasure, no less than my duty, to honor distinguished visitors to my court. My only regret is that the hospitality I am permitted to show ye accords not with your merits, but solely with my goodwill.

MELCHIOR.

[*bowing low.*]

Most gracious art thou, O King.

[*The MAGI, and ANTIPATER, all make obeisance, and exit center. When they disappear, HEROD descends hastily from dais, and knocks at secret door in wall. PHEON enters, and drops on knee.*]

HEROD.

Go thou by the secret way to the palace gate, and follow the mysterious strangers who but now left my presence, and journey unto Bethlehem. Find out whom they seek there, and return hither in all haste. On thy life lose not sight of them for a single instant until thine errand is accomplished.

PHEON.

It shall be as thou commandest, O King.

[PHEON *hastily rises, and with an obeisance, exit by secret door, and closes it after him.*]

HEROD.

[*standing still, center, and clenching hands.*]

He shall not escape me! He shall not escape me!

SCENE III.

Place of the Nativity by night. Same as in Act II, Scene II. MARY is heard singing within as curtain rises.

SONG.

Sweet babe divine, lie still and slumber.

God's holy angels hover round.

Celestial hosts, thought cannot number,

Watch o'er thee in earth's fetters bound.

Thou comest unto mankind showing

The love the Heavenly Father bears

For His poor children, who unknowing

His fields have sown with weeds and tares.

*Blest am I, on whose breast is resting
Thy holy head, O, Son of Light,
Who the sad world from evil wresting
Shall usher in God's day-spring bright.*

*[After a short pause, MARY emerges from cavern, glances
about her, and advances slowly to center.]*

MARY.

*[lifting her eyes toward heaven and crossing her hands
upon breast.]*

O great Jehovah, Lord God of Israel, how wonderful are Thy ways. Blessed, indeed, am I above women; since Thine Only begotten Son, descending from His throne of glory at Thy right hand to redeem a lost world, hath by Thy will through me taken on human form. I thank Thee for Thy great grace, and ever bless Thy holy name.

[Enter JOSEPH from cavern.]

JOSEPH.

[advancing toward her.]

Peacefully the blessed child sleepeth. Therefore, awhile mayst thou linger in the fresh air, my dearest Mary. Balmy it is as on a night in May; and verily here pervadeth a sweet and holy peace, such as no other spot on earth hath ever known. It is as though the unseen presence of the Heavenly Spirit brooded above it, and angelic hosts encompassed it 'round about.

MARY.

Yea, Joseph, God's blessed angels ever guard the Holy One. Verily the Most High hath given them charge

concerning Him, that in His helpless infancy He might have such protection as our feeble human power cannot afford.

JOSEPH.

Sooth speakest thou. But much doth it amaze me that Almighty Jehovah should choose that His divine Son, King of the Heavens, round whose pearly throne circle the blazing stars, and the Savior of the world, be born in a wretched stable, and be ministered unto only by humble and obscure folk, like thou and I, and the lowly shepherds who have so devotedly aided us in His care.

MARY.

The Lord's ways are not ours, dear Joseph. Deeply grieved was I at first, that He, my son and my Lord, whose birth was announced by an archangel, and heralded by heavenly choirs, should appear on earth amid such poor and mean surroundings; but now methinks, dimly can I perceive in this the divine purpose. Is it not meet that He, whom the prophets declare, shall proclaim good tidings to the poor, should Himself know poverty?

JOSEPH.

Mayhap thou art in the right. But why lacketh He the honor befitting one who shall be King of Israel and Lord of the world?

MARY.

No earthly honor needeth He. Unto what palace chamber hath thronged the blessed seraphs, who bask in the ineffable glory of the presence of God, as unto yonder humble shelter the Lord hath provided for His divine Son, and us His guardians?

JOSEPH.

Yet of men hath the Holy One thus far none to do
Him reverence save thou and I, and our friends the poor
shepherds.

MARY.

And could self-seeking courtiers, indifferent hirelings,
or reluctant bond-slaves, minister to the needs of a tender
babe like those who serve him with unquestioning faith
and love?

JOSEPH.

But how shall His work be accomplished, if He associ-
ates Himself with the poor and lowly of earth?

MARY.

Question not the wisdom of the Most High, my hus-
band. Rememberest thou not how Saul went forth to
seek two beasts strayed from his father's herd, and found
the crown of Judea, and David, our great ancestor, the
simple shepherd lad, likewise became king, and a mighty
man of war to save Israel from the wrath of the Gentiles?
The mission of the divine Messiah cannot fail. Though
He be despised and rejected of men, His glory shall
cover all lands as the waters cover the sea. Even now,
if it be the will of Jehovah, may the great and wise be
sent from the ends of the earth to do Him homage.

JOSEPH.

[bowing his head humbly.]

I stand rebuked, dear Mary.

MARY.

Now must I return to my watch beside the sleeping
babe lest he waken and have need of me.

[MARY re-enters cavern. *Star of Bethlehem again appears in sky, left, and moves slowly towards right, as before.*]

JOSEPH.

O, my blessed son, if mine thou mayest be called, who art the offspring of eternal God, forgive the weakness which caused my faith to falter in the midst of mysteries my feeble understanding comprehendeth not. Henceforth, whate'er betide, shall I rely upon the blessed promises of the Lord God of Israel, whose word cannot fail, and be in thought and deed obedient to His will. [*He glances toward trail.*] A company of men approach yonder. What would they?

[*The three MAGI, accompanied by their attendants, descend trail. They salute JOSEPH with Oriental salaams.*]

MELCHIOR.

Peace be unto thee, friend.

JOSEPH.

And unto ye. Whom seek ye?

MELCHIOR.

We seek Him who is born King of the Jews. His Star saw we in our homes in the far east, and have come to worship him. Behold the glorious planet, which hath guided us hither, hath stayed its course above yonder rude shelter. Canst thou tell us if there abideth the infant prince of Israel?

JOSEPH.

Yea, under that humble roof rests the holy Messiah,

whose advent the inspired prophets of the Lord God of Israel long since foretold, and whose glory shall encompass the whole world.

MELCHIOR.

Suffer us, then, to humbly lay at his feet the offerings of gold, frankincense and myrrh we have brought with us, typifying the reverence mankind through all future generations must pay unto the Holy One, whom the great God that even they which sit in darkness ignorantly worship, hath sent to redeem the world.

JOSEPH.

[opening door of cavern.]

Ye are most welcome. *[Calls.]* Mary!

[CASPAR takes golden casket from attendant, and MELCHIOR and BALTHAZAR alabaster vases from the two others. MARY appears in door of cavern.]

This is the mother of the Holy Babe.

MARY.

Ye are welcome, sirs. I pray ye enter.

The MAGI.

[together.]

We are most honored.

[They bow profoundly, and she leads the way into cavern.

JOSEPH lingers a moment.]

JOSEPH.

How strangely was Mary's prophecy fulfilled. Marvellous are the ways of Jehovah. Blessed is the name of the Lord.

[He enters cavern. After a moment's interval, the MAGI emerge from cavern, followed by JOSEPH and MARY. They turn and make obeisance.]

MARY.

The holy peace of the Most High who hath guided ye hither from far-off lands, O, noble strangers, abide with ye!

MELCHIOR.

Be it even so unto thee, O, blessed mother of the Redeemer of the World! Graciously permit that our servants may likewise pay homage to the Holy Babe?

MARY.

[bowing]

They will be welcome.

[The three MAGI go up to their attendants, and apparently speak to them in their own tongue. The servants approach cavern, and prostrate themselves before it, then follow MARY within. MELCHIOR turns to JOSEPH.]

MELCHIOR.

One favor would we crave of thee, most honored friend, ere we depart hence. This morning when we arrived in Jerusalem, did Herod, the king, send unto us his son, Prince Antipater, and besought us to visit him at his palace. There received he us in all graciousness; and on learning of the object of our search, called together a council of the wise men of the realm, who revealed unto him that the great prince, whom ye of Israel

call the Messiah, should be born in Bethlehem. Then bade he us journey thither and find him; and when we had done so return and disclose the place of his abode, that he might come and worship Him also. But, lo, when we were come unto Bethlehem, and tarried at the inn until nightfall that we might seek the aid of our mysterious guide, yon glorious star, [*points to star,*] there appeared unto us, as we sought repose after our journey a Celestial Messenger, who bade us return to our homes by another way, and in all secrecy. Therefore, prepared we to journey unto Tarsus, and there take ship, so have sent our goods thither by caravan. Knowest thou not some by-way that will lead us to the high-road to the coast without again entering the town; for much fear we the crafty king hath spies upon our track?

[*Attendants come from cavern, followed by MARY.*]

JOSEPH.

Yea, of such a path have I learned from the shepherds of these parts. Suffer me to guide ye to it.

MELCHIOR.

We thank thee. [*To MARY, bowing.*] Farewell, most blessed of women.

CASPAR and BALTHAZAR.

[*in turn, also bowing.*]

Farewell.

MARY.

Farewell, and God speed, noble strangers.

[Exit JOSEPH by trail, followed by the MAGI and their attendants. MARY advances to center. Light is thrown upon her. She crosses hands upon her breast and raises her eyes.]

My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour.

Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid; for behold henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

For He that is mighty hath done great things unto me, and holy is His name.

And His mercy is from generation to generation of them that fear Him.

He hath showed might in His arm. He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and hath exalted the humble.

He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away. [She kneels.]

He hath received Israel, His servant, being mindful of His mercy,

As He spake unto our fathers; to Abraham and to his seed forever.

[Angels, without sing.]

CHORUS of ANGELS.

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
And to the Holy Ghost!*

Amen!

SCENE IV.

Anteroom of HEROD's private apartments in his palace at Jerusalem. Arched doorway, center, hung with richly embroidered, crimson curtains. There is no furniture; but the floor is paved with variegated marbles, as in Scene II.

HEROD *discovered, divested of ceremonial robes and crown, moodily pacing back and forth.*

HEROD.

He shall not escape me! How can he?

[*Enter TOLLOMEO right I.*]

TOLLOMEO.

Pheon, the slave, whom thou didst bid me summon to thy presence immediately upon his return to the palace awaits thy pleasure.

HEROD.

Send him hither.

[*TOLLOMEO bows, and exits. Enter PHEON.*]

PHEON.

[*dropping on knee.*]

All hail, O, King!

HEROD.

What of thine errand? Stay not thy tongue.

PHEON.

[*striving to steady his voice.*]

I, O King, tracked the strangers thou didst bid me follow unto Bethlehem, and kept watch at the inn whilst they did tarry within. When night was come, and they

fared forth through the town, again I tracked them. But so great was the multitude gathered in the streets to behold the prodigious star that lately appeared in the heavens, that I lost sight of them in the press, nor could I learn whence went they. Then returned I unto the inn; and there was I told that they had departed for their own land, but none knew by what way.

HEROD.

[Seizing him by the throat and violently shaking him.]

Fool! Dolt! *[Releases hold on his throat, and glares fiercely into his face.]* Thou shalt die the death.

PHEON.

[Clasping his hands and groveling before the king.]

Have pity, O King! Have pity! All that I could did I to obey thy commands. Spare me! Spare me!

HEROD.

I warned thee not to let them elude thee on thy life. The word of Herod is sure. *[Claps his hands. Enter TOLLOMEO.]* Summon me the guard, and tarry thou here.

TOLLOMEO.

[bowing]

As thou sayest, O King!

[Claps hands. Enter two soldiers.]

HEROD.

[to soldiers.]

Take this blundering fool to the dungeons, and let him be tortured to death.

PHEON.

[still groveling before the king.]

Mercy, O King! Mercy!

HEROD.

[spurning him with foot.]

Take him away.

[Soldiers seize PHEON, and start to drag him off right.]

PHEON.

[struggling in their grasp.]

Have mercy, O King! Spare me! Spare me! Mercy!
Mercy!

*[Soldiers drag him off. He continues to cry, without,
until his voice dies away in the distance.]*

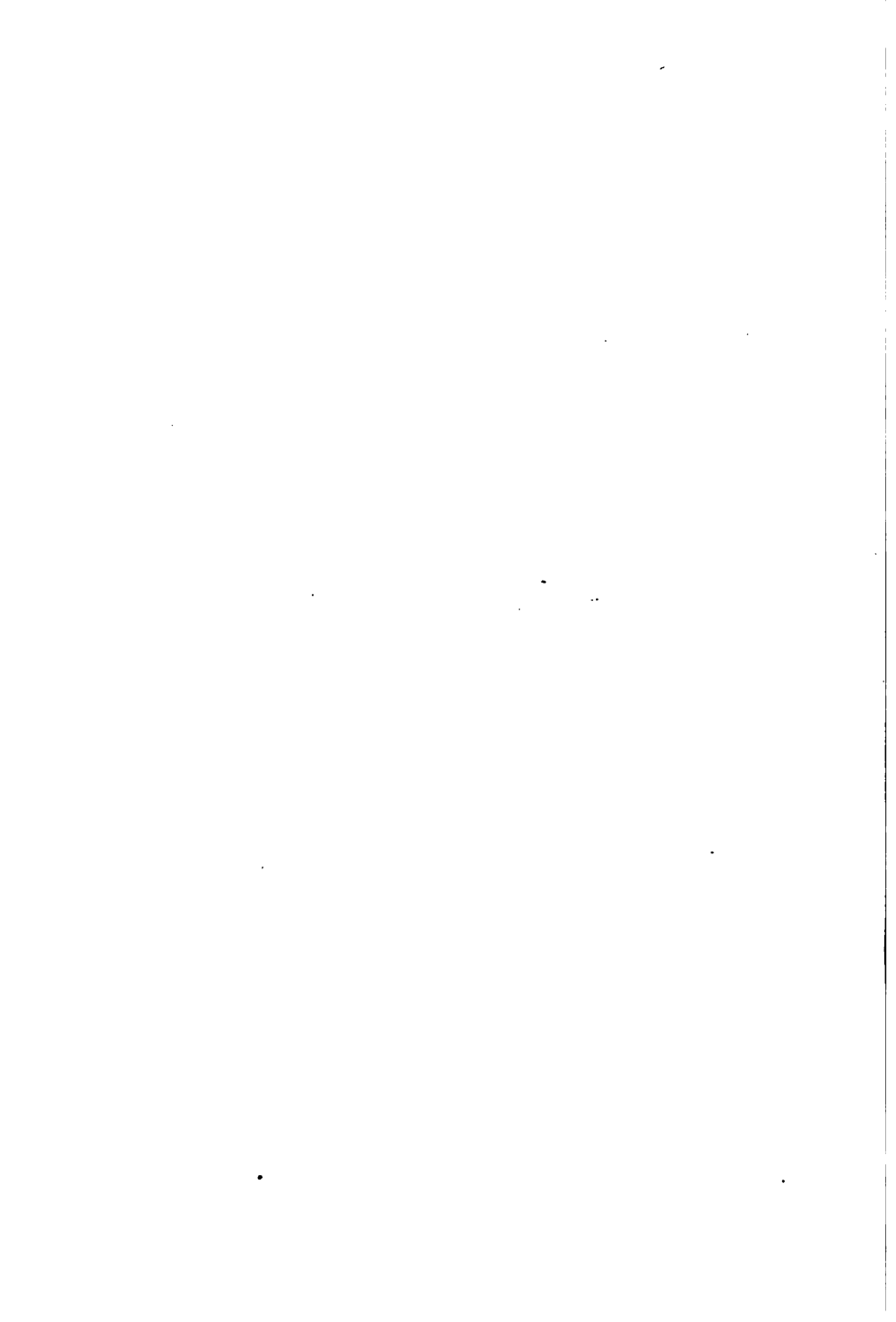
HEROD.

[to TOLLOMEO.]

Take thou a trusty band of thy men, and go unto Bethlehem. There slay every male child of two years and younger, within the town, and the country round about. See that thou spare not one, or thou shalt die a death of torture, even as that wretched slave; and like him shalt thou plead in vain for mercy. See thou to it.

TOLLOMEO.

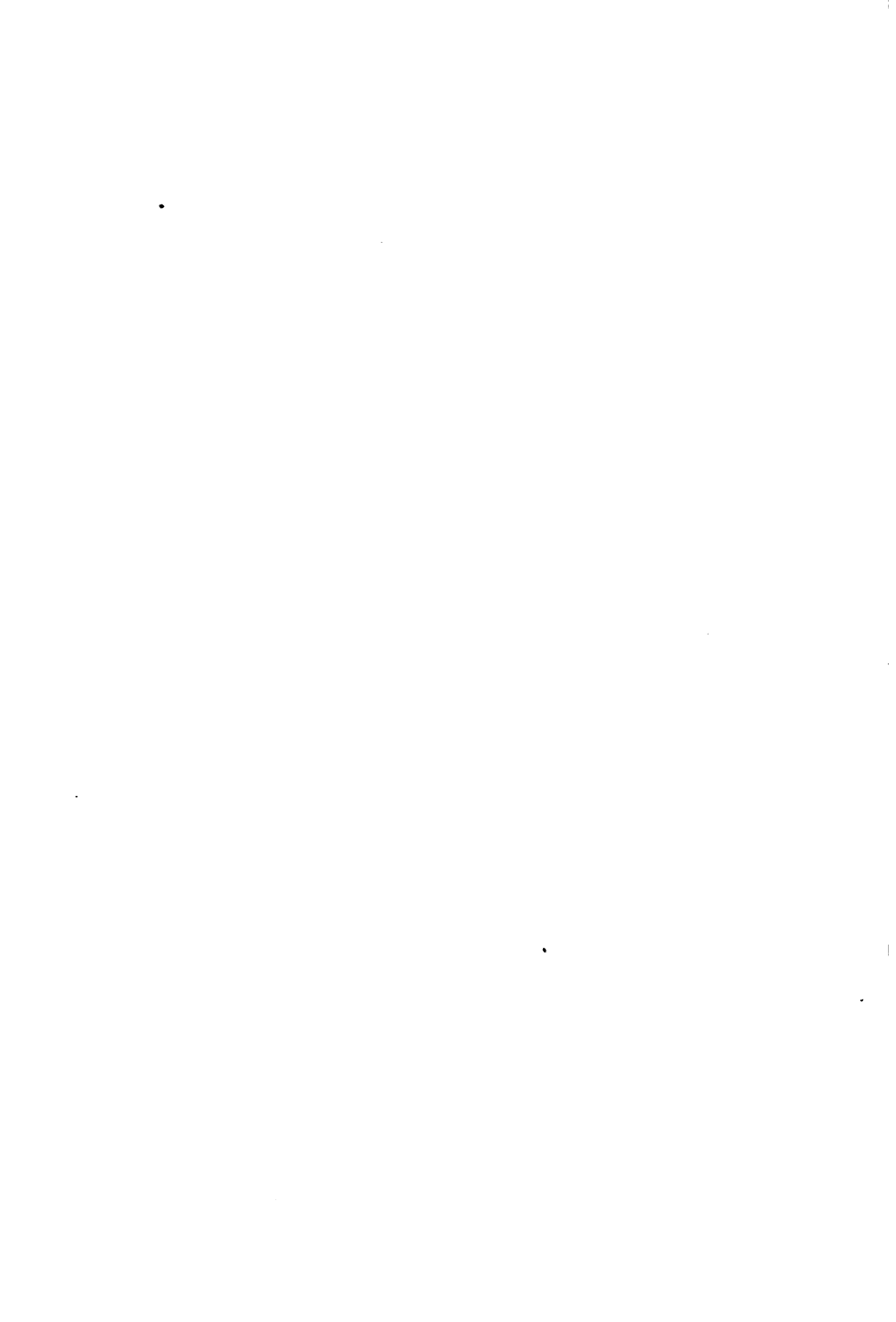
Thou shalt be obeyed, O King.







ACT V.



SCENE I.

Interior of Place of Nativity. Night. Walls and roof apparently of solid rock. At the extreme right, back, is the manger, a deep niche in the wall, filled with straw, in which may be dimly discerned a form, as of a sleeping babe, wrapped in Oriental drapery. A bright white light streams forth from the manger, affording the only illumination. Close beside it is a pallet of straw, on which MARY lies, covered by her cloak, apparently in profound slumber. Left, front, is another pallet on which JOSEPH lies, also seemingly in a deep sleep. The place has a semblance of comfort, according to Oriental ideas. The pallets are covered with Oriental blankets, and provided with cushions. Center, back, is a long rug, in the center of which are a few simple pieces of crockery, plates, cups, wine pitcher, etc.

Light in manger is suddenly extinguished, and after a few seconds' interval is thrown on back of scene, center, where appears the form of the ARCHANGEL, seen in Prelude.

ARCHANGEL.

[*chants.*]

Rise, O, Joseph, take the young child and its mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

[*The ARCHANGEL disappears, and light streams out from manger again. JOSEPH springs to his feet.*]

JOSEPH.

[*clasping his hands.*]

Alas, that the tender babe, and his mother who hath not yet recovered her strength, should be obliged to undertake this long and wearisome journey across desolate desert wastes to a strange and pagan land. But the command of the Heavenly Messenger must be obeyed. Mary! Mary!

MARY.

[*starting up.*]

Didst thou call me, Joseph?

JOSEPH.

Yea, Mary. [*MARY rises, and approaches him.*] Sad news have I for thee. This very night must we start on a journey to Egypt. For so was I but now commanded by an Angel of the Lord, who appeared unto me while I slept, and warned me that Herod would seek the Holy Child to slay Him. Thinkest thou that thou wilt be able to fare thus far in thy feeble state?

MARY.

Yea, my dear husband. The Lord will sustain me.

Glory be unto His holy name! Let us hasten to depart, lest danger draw nigh to the blessed child.

JOSEPH.

Gather together then our belongings here, while I find our beast, and prepare him for the journey, and ere many moments will we be upon our way.

[*Exit JOSEPH by the door, left. MARY gathers together rug, blanket, and cushions on JOSEPH'S pallet, and does them up in a neat bundle. She then packs articles of crockery carefully in bag. Enter JOSEPH left.*]

MARY.

Art thou ready to depart, Joseph?

JOSEPH.

Yea, dearest. I have filled our water-skin from the spring, that we will not need to tarry by the way. Ere dawn will we be far enough on our journey to the southward to elude the minions of the cruel king.

[*JOSEPH takes leathern thong, throws it around bundle, and ties it securely. MARY goes to manger, takes out the gifts of the MAGI and comes forward with them.*]

MARY.

Behold, dear husband, how wonderfully hath the Lord provided for the expense of our long journey, and our sojourn in a foreign land. Surely these precious gifts of the wise men of the East will sell for a sum sufficient to maintain us until the angel summon us hither again.

JOSEPH.

Yea, verily, marvelous are the ways of Jehovah.
Blessed is the name of the Lord!

[MARY places the MAGIS' gifts carefully in bag with dishes. JOSEPH fastens it securely to end of thong, slings it and bundle across shoulder, and exits again, left. MARY picks up her mantle she has left lying on her pallet, and puts it on.]

MARY.

[Standing still, right center, and crossing hands on breast.]

For He that is mighty hath done great things unto
me, and Holy is His name.

His mercy is from generation to generation of them
that fear Him.

He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their
hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and
hath exalted the humble.

[She glances about her.]

Farwell, humble shelter, more glorious than was ever
the most gorgeous of kingly palaces. Lo, in future ages
will all men esteem this the most sacred spot upon the
whole earth; hallowed as it has been by the advent of
the Son of the eternal God, the Saviour of the world.
Farewell, farewell! Blessed be this lowly abode forever.

[Enter JOSEPH.]

JOSEPH.

[standing in doorway.]

Come, Mary.

MARY.

Yea, Joseph.

[*She goes up to manger as if to take child. Lights are extinguished. Curtain goes up again, showing MARY standing by manger with child in her arms wrapped in mantle. Stage is darkened again.*]

SCENE II.

Garden and park of HEROD'S Country Palace of Herodium. Broad piazza, with colonnade of Corinthian columns, wreathed with roses, right, back of which rises facade of palace. The piazza is paved with variegated marbles, and a broad flight of marble steps conducts to the garden, which is adorned with blossoming roses, and other flowers. Left, is a border of tall trees, and in the background is a dense grove, showing a glimpse of an ornamental lake to the right. Left, center, 3, is a marble bench, set diagonally, facing towards right. On couch on piazza, set diagonally, facing towards left, HEROD is discovered reclining on cushions. A deep crimson glow as of a stormy sunset, pervades the scene, and the sky is apparently overcast with heavy clouds. Effect of clouds rolling slowly upward.

[*A low growl, as of distant thunder is heard. HEROD starts up from couch, and glances toward back of scene.*]

HEROD.

[*turning towards audience.*]

Even as yonder lowering storm-clouds gather in the heavens do perils and perplexities beset my reign, I feel now drawing towards its close. [*He descends steps, and paces moodily to and fro. Pauses center.*] Bowed down with cares and infirmities rather than years, yet can I know no rest. On every hand, unseen dangers lurk amid the shadows that overcast my path. Warily must I take each step lest the pitfalls mine enemies are ever digging for my feet engulf me.

[*He crosses to bench, and sits down. Enter PAGE from palace.*]

PAGE.

A courier from Rome awaits thy pleasure, O, King.

HEROD.

Conduct him hither.

PAGE.

I hasten to obey, O, King.

[*PAGE makes profound obeisance, and exits from palace.*

Enter COURIER of AUGUSTUS, in costume of Roman soldier, from palace, with roll of papyrus in his hand. He approaches HEROD, doffs helmet, and bows. HEROD rises.]

COURIER.

In all haste came I from Rome, O, King, to bear unto thee this message from Cæsar-Augustus, Consul and Tribune of the Roman people.

[*Extends scroll.*]

HEROD.

[taking scroll, and bowing.]

Thou art most welcome, as envoy of the Master of the World.

[Claps hands. Enter page, who stands still in door of palace.]

Conduct this noble Roman to the apartments of Prince Antipater, and command in my name that he be entertained in all honor, as befits a representative of my lord, the most illustrious Cæsar-Augustus, Emperor of Rome.

PAGE.

[bowing]

It shall be as thou commandest, O King.

[COURIER bows, and follows PAGE to the palace. HEROD opens scroll.]

HEROD.

[reading.]

To Herod, King of Judea, Greeting:—Having learned this day from an unquestioned source that there is even now hatching in thy court a plot threatening the liberty and the life of thy noble sons, Aristobulus and Alexander, for whom, as having been reared and educated under mine own eyes here in Rome, I cherish a particular solicitude, I hereby summon thee to repair immediately to Rome that I may obtain from thee assurance of their safety. In this fail not. Hail and farewell! CAESAR.

Given at Rome, in the year 745 from the foundation of the city, and of our empire 44.

[HEROD rolls up scroll, placing it in bosom of his robe. Deeper growls of thunder heard, as if storm were approaching. Red light dies out, and stage is dimly lighted.]

More plots. So Aristobulus and Alexander have complained of me to Cæsar. Well, I will journey unto Rome, and make such promises as will satisfy the Emperor. But let them beware. An I once have proof that they are conspiring against me, not even for their mother's sake will I spare them. I will crush them, as I will all others that would thwart me, like worms beneath my heel. [*Rises and paces restlessly back and forth.*] Let them beware! Let them beware! [*Pauses center.*] Augustus dare not depose me; for well he knows, as did Antony, that I alone can hold the turbulent peoples of these subjugated lands in check, and a great lover of peace is he.

[*Another roll of thunder is heard. Enter TOLLOMEO hastily from palace. HEROD sits down on bench, and turns to him.*]

Well?

TOLLOMEO.

[*bowing*]

I come to report, O, King, the accomplishment of the task thou last night didst lay upon me.

HEROD.

Say on.

TOLLOMEO.

In obedience to thy command, O King, chose I five

hundred of my trustiest men, whom I did promise rich reward for compliance with thy will, and even as thou didst menace me, threatened with direst penalties of thy wrath if they should fail. These mounted I upon our swiftest and sturdiest steeds; so ere the night wore late arrived we at Bethlehem. Here, after placing guards at all the exits of the town, that none might escape therefrom, divided I the troops into two bands, one of which set I to search all the dwellings of the town, while the other ordered I to scour the country, even to the most remote crannies of the hills.

HEROD.

[muttering to himself.]

Then must he have perished. How could he have escaped?

TOLLOMEO.

Not one escaped, O, King. Verily can I testify that in Bethlehem, and the coasts thereof, now remains alive no male child of two years or under; for ere I departed from thence with all diligence did I inspect the work of slaughter, that obedience to thy commands should in no wise fail.

HEROD.

'Tis well. Didst thou meet with a determined show of resistance?

TOLLOMEO.

Yea, O King. In the town, upon our first attack, men armed themselves with whatever might serve for weapons, and opposed our progress from street to street; and in the country likewise organized they into armed bands,

and waged a desperate conflict. Yet was all their valor futile; for the soldiers did ride them down, and trample them beneath the hoofs of their steeds, or put them mercilessly to the sword.

HEROD.

And what of the women?

TOLLOMEO.

They, also, when they found that prayers and tears availed not, did fight like tigresses in defense of their young; and when their strength failed them, many threw themselves upon the sword, or making shields of their bodies to protect their little-ones, were slain by the same strokes that killed their babes.

HEROD.

It must have been a scene of havoc.

TOLLOMEO.

Yea, O King. Ere we had accomplished our work, the homes and streets of Bethlehem were even as shambles; and in the country round about the houses and fields were strewn with corpses, and swimming in blood. Men, exhausted from battle and covered with wounds, glared at us with looks of ferocious hatred in their eyes; and frantic women rushed to and fro, wailing, beating their breasts, rending their garments, and showering dust upon their heads.

HEROD.

Such scenes are deplorable, but often are they necessary for the safety of the state. What measures didst thou take to preserve the public peace?

TOLLOMEO.

A strong force stationed I in the town that there might be no uprising there, and gave orders that no organized bands be admitted from without.

HEROD.

'Tis well. And art thou sure that none of thy men gave heed to any plea for mercy?

TOLLOMEO.

None, O King. All were slain. Many mothers tried to secrete their babes; but the little ones, knowing not how to guard themselves from danger, by their cries betrayed their hiding-places, and were dragged forth, and slaughtered. Parents who sought to flee with their babes were stopped, and the children snatched from their arms, and despatched before their eyes. In the suburbs came we upon a child, in costly raiment, in charge of a woman of the people, who besought us to spare him, saying he was thy son. Hearing this, the soldiers would fain have stayed their arms. But I, mindful of thy explicit command, didst slay him with my own hand.

HEROD.

[Grasping arm of bench convulsively, utters sharp cry of pain.]

Ey!

[He bows his head in his hands and groans.]

TOLLOMEO.

What is thy further pleasure, O King?

HEROD.

[springing to his feet]

Begone! Thy face is hateful to me. Such murderous instruments as thou kings must perforce make use of even while abhorring them *[HE takes heavy purse of gold from the bosom of his robe, and tosses it at the feet of TOLLOMEO.]* With this pay thou thy fiendish cut-throats and thyself; and seek no more my presence till I summon thee.

[TOLLOMEO picks up purse, and strides off into palace.

HEROD drops down again on bench.]

The fresh blood of those slaughtered innocents seems smoking from the ground here at my feet, and its odor assails my nostrils.

[Shudders, bows head on hands again, and groans.

Springs to his feet, and strides to right, front, and back, wringing his hands.]

My own child! My own child! I meant not that! I meant not that!

[Drops down on bench again. Long roll of thunder is heard. Voice of rabbi is heard within the palace, reading.]

RABBI.

In Rama was a voice heard, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning. Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

[Another roll of thunder. HEROD groans again. QUEEN AZILI rushes frantically from palace, in court costume, with diadem on head, but with hair dishevelled, and disordered garments.]

AZILI.

Jehovah blast thee with His wrath, thou bloody tyrant!
[*Another roll of thunder.*]

HEROD.

[*starting up, in a tone of tenderness*]
What meanest thou, dear wife?

AZILI.

How darest thou call me by the sacred name of wife?
Monster! Fiend! Why didst thou make me mother of
thy child, only to slay him in his tender infancy?

HEROD.

[*sternly*]
Restrain thyself, woman.

AZILI.

Nay, tyrant of Judea. In this hour from my lips shalt
thou hear the truth. My words brand thee what thou
art; a wretch abhorred of God and man; one whose bloody
deeds had shamed the ravening tiger. So vile art thou,
that even fiends in deepest gulfs of hell might shudder
at thy name.

HEROD.

Silence! I am the king.

AZILI.

Yea, of demons. Let Beelzebub resign his throne, and
reign thou in his stead.

HEROD.

[*springing to his feet*]

Nay, King of Judea am I; and till my last gasp will

defend my throne 'gainst whomsoever seeks to snatch it from me.

AZILI.

Yea, a throne secured through wrong and maintained by murder. But didst thou fear the puny hands of babes would hurl thee from it?

HEROD.

What's mine is mine, howe'er it was obtained, and I will hold it while breath stirs my frame. I fear not gods nor men; but I must needs be wary would I circumvent the schemes my foes devise to ruin me. Babes ere now have served as nuclei round which hath treason twined.

AZILI.

Was that the reason thou didst slay our child?

HEROD.

Nay, that I meant not; yet perchance 'twas best. Hast thou not heard long since was prophesied unto me a child should claim my throne? And two days since appeared in Jerusalem three wise men of the East, saying they came to seek him who was born King of the Jews. Then straightway called I a council of learned doctors of the law, who declared unto me that the Messiah, for whom Israel looks, must needs be born in Bethlehem. So sent I the strangers thither, bidding them find the babe they sought, then return to me and reveal the place of his abode. They returned not, nor could the spy I set upon them discover whence went they. Therefore ordered I every male child whose age might serve as pretense that he was the Messiah put to the sword. Our son I thought not to exempt, so with the rest he perished.

AZILI.

Thou fool! And wouldst thou pit thy petty power against Omnipotence? If, indeed, the Messiah hath appeared, could not Jehovah send one of His angels to snatch Him from thy cutthroat's bloody grasp? Do not the Scriptures tell how such He sent to deliver the three Hebrew children from Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace, and shut the mouths of the lions the same cruel king would fain have had devour the prophet Daniel?

HEROD.

Tush! But priestly fables. Wherefore, then, did not thy great Jehovah save the helpless babes of Bethlehem, that even I can pity?

AZILI.

Thou pity? Yea, as the lion pities the lamb he slays, as the serpent the victim of its fangs. God's ways are not as man's, but His vengeance yet shall overtake thee.

HEROD.

Nay, I slay not without need, I but safeguard my state. [HE rises.] Thy words pierce like daggers. Since Marianna died no one thus hath dared brave Herod to his face. But, there, I pardon thee. Come, my dear wife, together let us mourn our hapless son's untimely death. [HE tries to embrace her. She wrenches herself from his arms.]

AZILI.

Come no more near me. I shudder at thy touch, as at some slimy reptile's. Fitly hath Jehovah punished me, that lured by the glitter of a crown, I sold myself to thee, thou fiend in human form. I'd rather be meanest of slaves,

or homeless beggar starving in the streets, than reign thy queen. Take back thy diadem.

[Tears diadem from her hair, and throws it at his feet.]

HEROD.

[mockingly]

Then go, and mourn alone, or join thy wails with Bethlehem's bereaved mothers.

AZILI.

Inhuman monster! Yea, we will bewail our murdered babes, I and those other mothers. But no more shalt thou pollute thy blood-steeped throne. Die, tyrant.

[She snatches jewelled dagger from her girdle, and rushes upon him. He grasps her wrists, wrenches her hand free from dagger, and it falls to the ground. He places his foot upon it, releases her and draws sword.]

AZILI.

[tearing open the bosom of her robe]

Strike! Strike! Slay me, since I have failed in killing thee. Slaughter the mother as thou didst the child.

HEROD.

[sheathing his sword]

Nay, even as I told thee, I slay not uselessly. Hyrcanus and Aristobulus would fain have seized my crown, therefore them I slew. Marianna conspired against my life; and worse, did torture me with sight of love turned to hatred. Her, likewise, did I slay. But thou I love not, and thy words of hate can have no power to hurt me. Thou hast no following to make thee dangerous to the realm. Begone in peace.

[Sits down on bench]

AZILI.

[throwing up her arms]

Hear me, Lord God of Israel! Hear me in the name of Bethlehem's sorrowing mothers. Pour thou out upon this bloody tyrant the vials of Thy wrath. Let all his schemes be foiled. Let all who own his blood make him a mockery. Let his name be a byword and a hissing on men's lips for untold ages. Send down upon him plagues. Let his frame be racked with tortures like unto those that he on others hath inflicted. Let his bones rot. Let his flesh breed sores, more loathly and more foul than leprosy. Let worms devour his body while he lives, and after death doom Thou his soul to hell. Hear me, Thou great Jehovah! Lord God Almighty, hear me! Amen! Amen! Amen!

[A great peal of thunder, and vivid flash of lightning, answer her. She rushes frantically into the palace.

HEROD cowers down on bench and shudders, as if terrified, then springs to his feet.]

HEROD.

Jehovah! What have I to do with Jehovah? Let priests prate of the power of Israel's God. I am King, by my own might and the power of heathen Rome, that knows naught of Jehovah. Him I defy.

[Another roll of thunder and flash of lightning. Stage is darkened, and spirits of Hyrcanus and Aristobulus appear right center, back, illumined with a ghastly, blue light.]

Back, phantoms, to your graves. Ye plotted treason, and ye got your dues.

[*Spirit of MARIANNA appears center. HEROD stretches out his arms toward her and cries out in a voice of anguish.*]

Marianna! Marianna!

[*The first spirits glide over to center beside MARIANNA, and all three point at HEROD. He drops down again on seat, and crouches there for a moment as if overcome with terror, then springs up again.*]

This is but phantasy. Or stay, perchance it is a trick devised by my foes to fright me into madness. An that be so, with mine own hand I'll slay these mummers. [*He draws his sword.*]

It is already wet with blood.

[*Wipes blade on fringe of his sash. Sword drops from his hand, and he sinks down on bench.. Clasps his throat with his hand.*]

Blood! Blood! I choke with blood!

[*Gauze curtain drops in front of spirits, and they disappear. Sound as of a rushing wind is heard, and then of wailing women. HEROD repeats in a hoarse whisper.*]

"In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted because they are not."

[*Shrieks and groans, as of some one under torture, mingled with cries of "Mercy! Mercy!" HEROD again whispers*]

That was Pheon's voice.

[*A great voice is heard from above saying, "HEROD thou art accursed." A terrific peal of thunder, and flash of lightning. HEROD starts to his feet.*]

The wrath of Jehovah is upon me!

[*Falls on his face. Curtain is raised at back, showing tableau of Flight into Egypt. MARY seated on donkey, a child in her arms, wrapped in her mantle, and JOSEPH walking by her side, supported by staff. All is illumined with a bright golden light.*]



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